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Demystification of Stephen King's Fiction in the Context of Postmodernism

2015

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Introducion

This monograph centers on the postmodernist tendencies incorporated in the work of Stephen King, who constitutes one of the most prominent contemporary authors of horror fiction. It also deals with King´s place in the literary tradition as it is perceived by literary critics.

The topic of this work was chosen mainly because of King´s status in literature, in spite of the fact that he has produced many valuable literary artifacts. Because of the fact that King is labeled as a horror fiction writer by renowned critics such as Harold Bloom and Dwight Allen, his status in literature is diminished and his work has been continually cast aside as mere popular fiction. This is a label given to authors of what academics often call low-culture literature. For this reason, the present monograph examines selected works from King's literary corpus through the lens of postmodernism.

The aim of this book is to explore Stephen King's work in the context of various postmodernist tendencies characteristic of contemporary high-culture literature, in order to demystify his status in the literary tradition that is veiled by academic criticism. It will be argued that Stephen King´s fictional corpus encompasses a number of prominent literary as well as scientific postmodernist tendencies which greatly contribute to the rise of his literary status not only as a titan of horror fiction but also as a valuable figure who deserves his rightful place in contemporary literary tradition.

This book is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is comprised of two subchapters, the initial one providing an insight into King's present status in the literary tradition. The focus of this analysis is put on scrutinizing the negative criticism imposed on King's work in order to establish the foundation upon which a serious literary examination is conducted. The second subchapter is largely theoretical, introducing the postmodernist literary and scientific concepts, namely the practice of metafiction, Lacanian post-structuralist psychoanalysis and the notion of intertextuality, all of which are later found to be rooted in King's literary body of work.

The second chapter deals with three unique forms of metafiction introduced to literature by Stephen King, i.e. psychogenic metafiction, transpositional metafiction and corporeal metafiction. This part is divided into three subchapters, each dealing with the respective singular metafictional forms.

The third chapter discusses the employment of the fundamental elements of Lacanian post-structuralist psychoanalysis found in Stephen King's *The Shining*, *The Dark Half*, *Salem's Lot* and the *Dark Tower* series. Lacan's contemporary psychoanalysis also provides a bridge for the analysis conducted in chapter four, which analyzes the notion of intertextuality in King's novel *Duma Key*, which is expressed by the examination not only of the written discourse itself, but also of the origin of artistic talent in general.

The focus of the fifth chapter is understood as the culmination of King´s postmodernist attempts through the literary examination his magnum opus, the *Dark Tower* series. This literary epic is composed of fragmented metaphorical manifestations of all postmodernist tendencies that can be found in Stephen King's literary works discussed in the previous chapters of the present monograph.

I sincerely hope that this book will provide its readers with detailed insight into postmodernist tendencies present in Stephen King's fiction as well as with a general outlook on King's approach to understanding the two universes that envelop us: the literary and our own. Furthermore, I sincerely hope that this book will constitute a good source of information germane to its topic; especially considering the severe lack of resources regarding contemporary literary and scientific tendencies incorporated in King's the literary fiction.

1 Stephen King in the Context of Contemporary Literature

Stephen King is an author who indisputably belongs to a pantheon of several of the best writers in the genre of horror fiction. Critics, such as Anthony Magistrale, also agree on the fact that King constitutes the only literary progeny descended from the line of authors such as Edgar Allan Poe and Howard Phillips Lovecraft. (Magistrale, 1992, p. 27) Ranging from what King, in his famous literary account of horror fiction named *Danse Macabre*, calls "*inside evil*," (King, 1991, p. 84) introduced to the world by Poe's most renowned narratives and through the "*outside*" or "*cyclopean evil*" (p. 85) embodied in the horrifying terrors of H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos and other short stories, King creates a truly remarkable fictional universe. In King's case though, it is much better suited to call it a multiverse, because he tends to bend and twist reality beyond recognition while using the real world only as a point of reference out of which a large number of other universes exist side by side. These universes are, in King's literary corpus, deeply intertwined and the veil between them is sometimes thick, sometimes thin and sometimes simply non-existent. King's creative genius stems from his ability to look far behind the shroud which people perceive as the actual, the true, the existent. King combines two of the most universal, frightening, yet very real and powerful concepts

introduced to literature by his very own poetic models, Poe and Lovecraft, thus reinventing the genre of horror fiction.

As it will be demonstrated throughout this work, Stephen King's fictional multiverse operates on a vast number of literary principles. However, the focus of this book is put strictly on the postmodern literary devices employed and embedded deep within King's literary corpus, thus demonstrating that there is a lot more to reading his work than it is widely believed in the academic circles, as will be illustrated in the course of this chapter.

Stephen King was born in 1947 in Portland, Maine. He studied at the University of Maine and later taught English. His novel *Carrie* (1974) and its subsequent adaptation into a movie was the first of many novels which helped him to overcome poverty and enabled him to fully devote himself to what he loves the most – writing. The publication of *Carrie* was followed by an endless stream of other successful novels such as *The Stand* (1978), *The Shining* (1977), *It* (1986), *Bag of Bones* (1998), *Duma Key* (2008), *The Dark Tower* series (1982-2004), *On Writing (A Memoir of the Craft)* (2000), *Dreamcatcher*(2001), and many more. Among his most successful collections of short stories are *Night Shift* (1978), *Nightmares & Dreamscapes* (1993), *Skeleton Crew* (1985) and *Everything's Eventual* (2002). In 2003, once and for all, it has been proven that Stephen King is an author of great importance and significance in the literary tradition by the fact that he has been awarded The National

Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters, one of the most prestigious literary awards in the United States. The gain of this award has put him up there, among other serious contemporary writers such as Eudora Welty, Phillip Roth, Don DeLillo, Ray Bradbury or Norman Mailer.

1.1 Literary Value vs. Popularity

First of all, it is imperative that the simulacrum which constitutes King's fiction be sufficiently demystified and therefore, not shrouded in mystery and veiled in unfair criticism. What should be judged is the merit and relevance not of the author, the person behind the words, the one responsible for fiction, but rather fiction itself.

Second of all, in order to judge King's work fairly, it is absolutely necessary to establish his fictional work as a potential candidate for a serious literary examination, in this case, from the point of view of postmodernist literary criticism. The only way to subject his work to literary scrutiny is through what postmodernist theorists do best; that is, blurring the lines between two opposing phenomena. In this case, the phenomena are represented by popular genre fiction and serious literary fiction. It is possible to look at King's work in many contexts but it is crucial to liberate his work from the arbitrary confines of the infamous label entitled 'popular fiction'. Stephen King's literary fiction has been assigned the label of horror fiction for better classification. As it is well known,

contemporary literature is in a perpetual state of chaos, because of the immense number of writers who produce their work in many different literary and thematic styles. Therefore, in this case, classification is imminent, not to mention essential. In today's turmoil of a world, people need to have a sense of order, or at least a loose grasp of things while swimming in a sea of information. That is the reason why King's, who is also called 'horror master' by his vast audience, as well as many other authors' works are dismissed as mere genre fiction.

King's literary corpus is hardly definable within the parameters of horror fiction which is mainly because he likes to experiment with different literary genres. That is not the only reason for demystifying King though. The most important thing about his work is that the themes incorporated within his work tend to have a spirit of the universal. King toys with themes which are very close to each and every human being. It could be said that his approach to the reader speaks to the most fundamental primal self of people. In other words, his themes have a certain quality to them which triggers the dormant innate senses in the human psyche, which in turn responds to King's brilliant understanding of the darkness interiorized in every human being with surprising outbursts of emotion. King addresses many themes in the vastness of his literary multiverse and it is impossible to name all of them. It is no surprise, since he has written over fifty novels and ten collections of short stories thus far. However, it is

possible to put them in very broad categories. In essence, the themes in his fiction could be perceived as psychological, philosophical, ethical and moral, and socio-political. In a literary multiverse as vast as King's, it is understandable that these themes are not mutually exclusive, but they very frequently and premeditatedly overlap. As King himself put it:

> ...the horror genre has often been able to find national phobic pressure points and those books and films which have been the most successful almost always seem to play upon and express fears which exist across a wide spectrum of people. Such fears, which are often political, economic, and psychological rather than supernatural, give the best work of horror a pleasing allegorical feel... (King, 1991, 18-19).

What King wants to emphasize here is quite clear. He wants to look beyond the constraints of mere horror fiction as a genre-oriented form of writing and focus on using horror as an implement, as a conduit through which to address serious deeply personal, social as well as, in the context of this work, literary issues. The postmodern condition is fragile as it is, and King very well understands the fact that it is not specters (*The Shining*), vampires (*Salem's Lot*), horrifying clowns (*It*) or murdering doubles (*Dark Half*) which scare us. It is either our own reflection in the mirror, or the transference of unconscious thought into the conscious mind through the revelation that what truly scares us is insanity and alcoholism; the violence and disgust sometimes triggered by homophobia; the acts of abusive parents afflicted upon the child; the fragmentation and alienation of the self, and many more. These are the true fears which subside in

the debts of the human psyche and this is exactly what King's work explores in surprising depth and detail.

That being said, the work of Stephen King can be subject to scrutiny after all. As soon as it is realized that the man's work may have some literary merit after all, in the context of literary criticism, it can be stated that the simulacrum which King's literary corpus undoubtedly is, blurs the boundary between serious and popular fiction. King thus becomes not only the modern paragon of horror fiction; he becomes the one using the power of terror, just as it is in his fictional multiverse, to pierce the thin veil which constitutes the border between two universes; worlds which are very close, yet very far apart; the genre specific and the serious, the literary. Therefore, it could be claimed that King's work does meet the requirements necessary for considering him as a candidate for some sort of literary merit.

The horror master's work has been a subject of academic debate over the last decade or so and, as it tends to be in any argument, there are at least two sides of looking at King's fiction from the standpoint of literary criticism. There are critics who continually and adamantly attack King's work but, sadly, not only his work but his person as well. They frequently comment on the fact that he makes a lot of money doing what he seems to be doing very well and also enjoying it. They have a problem with the amount of money he earns producing a massive quantity of the written word in a fairly short

amount of time. Among those critics are names more or less known in the literary circles, such as Harold Bloom, a particularly resonant name of a professor of humanities at the University of Yale, Connecticut, or Dwight Allen, a fiction writer and author of books such as *The Typewriter Satyr* (2009), *The Green Suit* (2011), and others. Then there are critics who praise King's work for his inventiveness, vast variety of themes he employs in his writing, not to mention many of his own contributions to horror fiction and literature in general. Among the most prominent ones is definitely the life-long advocate of King's work Anthony Magistrale, a professor of literature at the University of Vermont, specializing in Gothic and Contemporary horror fiction, and Samuel Schumann, an associate professor at the University of Maine in Orono.

In his essay entitled *My Stephen King Problem: A Snob's Notes*, Dwight Allen states several inadequacies which, in his opinion, plague Stephen King's fiction, several of them being things like slow-paced narration, lack of momentum, or flat characters, while not supporting his claims with absolutely no evidence in the form of excerpts directly from the source text, or at least citing literary critics to endorse his affirmations. This kind of a stance when writing a critique is insubstantial, feeble, not to mention the fact that it comes across as very elitist. Allen further undermines himself by stating in a part of his essay that "*One reason that I may have turned away from King's fiction is that the genres (horror and fantasy) he worked in*

didn't appeal to me. At an early age, I developed a fairly deep fear of scary stories and movies" (Allen, 2012). He continues to further shake the foundation of his critique by stating elsewhere that Stephen King has been doing very well as a popular writer and didn't need his money for buying one of his books. These rather childish statements account for the attitude with which Allen approaches King's work and it is not surprising that the very nature of this essay seems very hostile. For when one wants to create an objective literary account of a particular piece of writing or a specific author, one has to steer very far from judgmental and irrelevant statements. It is remarkable that not only a fellow writer of literary fiction but more so, a reviewer of literature can write a criticism in a style which refutes the very idea of critiquing.

Now, turning to Harold Bloom, a noteworthy and very famous name when it comes to literary criticism. Bloom is a respected member of the community of literary critics and he even published two editions of a book on Stephen King, as well as a short response to King receiving the National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters in 2003. By performing a point by point examination of these two sources of criticism, it can be concluded that in this case, Harold Bloom fails as a literary critic. In the afterword to his book called *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Stephen King* (which consists of a series of essays written by literary scholars on a number of different subjects

concerning the phenomena enrolled in King's literary corpus, all safe for one in support of King's literary merit and value) Harold Bloom writes: „*As a novelist and story-writer, he impresses me as being no more or less aesthetically and cognitively valuable than* […] *other popular novelists. That is to say King does not seem to me a borderline literary phenomenon.* […] *King's books are not literary at all.*" (Bloom, 2007, p. 207) And later on Bloom continues with his critique of King's most noteworthy poetic models by saying:

> King, whatever his qualities, emerges from an American tradition one could regard as sub-literary.[…]Nothing is justifiable about Poe's prose (or his verse), but Poe dreamed or constructed universal and permanent nightmares. Lovecraft, whom I find very hard to get through, nevertheless receives a cogent defense in exegesis, Victoria Nelson's *The Secret Life of Puppets*. Lovecraft takes us back to the major ancient and Renaissance heresies: Neoplatonism, Hermeticism, Gnosticism […] but I hardly believe that King would be improved as a writer by an immersion into Neoplatonism (Bloom, 2007, p.208).

And, finally addressing specific issues regarding King's writing, Bloom states that "*I will avoid King's obvious inadequacies: cliché-writing, flat characters who are names upon a page, and in general a remarkable absence of invention for someone edging into the occult, the preternatural, the imaginary*" (Bloom, 2007, p. 208). While some of King's works may seem too long and descriptive, what Bloom adamantly refuses to perceive in King's writing, are themes that King employs in his fiction. In other words, Harold Bloom is unable to look beyond the veil of horror fiction which surrounds King's literary endeavors.

Bloom makes an immense mistake by writing a forward to a critique of Stephen King's literary body of work in such a dismissive and elitist manner. Same as Allen before him, he does not present any textual evidence the back his statements which, in turn, become mere allegations. Furthermore, he completely unprecedentedly, assaults both of King's poetic models, one of who belongs among several of the most influential authors of all time, Edgar Allan Poe. Poe's prose needs no justification. It is in itself a work of serious literary fiction and it speaks for itself. The remarkable inventiveness represented in his writing has no literary equal. Bloom completely dismisses the fact that E.A. Poe is the father of the deductive detective novel through his stories of August Dupin, a French detective who uses deductive reasoning to solve crimes which was later adopted by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle into the creation of the famous character of Sherlock Holmes. Poe also brought deep psychologism of characters where the focus is put mostly on the characters' thoughts rather than their actions. He also very vividly introduced irrational and immaterial fears to literature. Poe was among the first authors who came up with the literary phenomenon of psychic projection; paralleling the state of a characters' mind to the literary environment, as it was so skillfully done in many of his narratives, like *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839), or *The Cask of Amontillado* (1846). The only thing Bloom credits Poe for is the construction of permanent nightmares but there is a lot more to his work than that. It is just another example of the conceitedness and

Bloom's complete dismissal of the value which several of the most prominent writers of Gothicism were able to bestow upon literature. Furthermore, the very fact that he has devoted two of his Critiques to Stephen King (something that, at least to my knowledge, has rarely been done by Bloom), begs the question why has he done so…

Bloom's criticism of King's writing is symptomatic of the centuries-long dismissal of horror fiction as a relevant and valuable literary phenomenon. Horror fiction is capable of finding the aforementioned phobic pressure points which speak to society as a whole, but it is not just about the masses. King also highlights the individual by saying that,

> ...what scares us the most about Mr. Hyde, perhaps, is the fact that he was a part of Dr. Jekyll all along. And in an American society that has become more and more entranced by the cult of me-ism, it should not be surprising that the horror genre has turned more and more to trying to show us a reflection we won't like – our own (King, 1991, p. 316).

This is what King always tries to emphasize in his writing. Exploring the complexity of the human psyche via his universal characters such as Jack Torrence in *The Shining* (1977), Morton Rainey in "Secret Window, Secret Garden" (1990), or Lester Billings in "The Boogeyman" (1973). They all seem like victims of their own complex labyrinth of a psyche rather than what they truly are; very disturbed and flawed human beings plagued by darkness which is embedded deeply within their minds. King believes that this darkness is present in everyone but more of less suppressed, and that

is the reason why his characters resonate so much and why his themes are universal. Harold Bloom seems to refuse to see this.

In 2003, Stephen King won the aforementioned medal which stirred up quite the maelstrom of responses, most of which were praises to King. However, there were several who thought that the committee awarding this medal made a terrible mistake. Among those critics was also Harold Bloom. He wrote a very short response to this literary event in the September issue of *The Boston Globe*. It was called *Dumbing Down American Readers*. In this article Bloom states that

> THE DECISION to give the National Book Foundation's annual award for "distinguished contribution" to Stephen King is extraordinary, another low in the shocking process of dumbing down our cultural life. I've described King in the past [in the 2002 first edition of his critique] as a writer of penny dreadfuls, but perhaps even that is too kind. He shares nothing with Edgar Allan Poe. What he is is an immensely inadequate writer on a sentence-by-sentence, paragraph-by-paragraph, book-by-book basis (Bloom, 2003).

After that, he very casually and briefly compares King's work to the work of J.K. Rowling and after that the theme of the whole article abruptly changes. Bloom talks about his life as a literary critic and about the American novelists (Thomas Pynchon, Phillip Roth, Cormac McCarthy and Don DeLillo) who, in his opinion, should have been nominated. The article concludes by Bloom saying: "*Instead, this year's award goes to King. It's a terrible mistake*" (Bloom, 2003). Bloom contradicts himself up to a point when he

writes that King has nothing to do with E.A. Poe. A year before he wrote this article, he stated that King comes from a long tradition stemming from Poe and Lovecraft. This contradiction renders his criticism mute. Poe and King share many elements and there are many forms of inspiration by Poe which can be found in King's literary corpus. For example, King's novel *The Shining* incorporates allusions to Poe's *Masque of the Red Death* (1845), *The Black Cat* (1843), and *The Fall of the House of Usher*, as well as it embodies literary devices employed in Poe's writing such as the use of symbols and psychic projection of the character upon the environment. King's view of society also corresponds with that of Poe's; that is, that society is a necessary evil and King, like Poe, prefers individualism above social norms.

In conclusion, two of the most prominent critiques standing in opposition to King being perceived as an, at least, borderline literary phenomenon are basically vacuous. It is so because they come across as elitist, biased, contradictory, and without a solid foundation in the form of claim support. Anthony Magistrale definitely spoke to the point when he addressed this issue by saying that

> King has emerged, like a rock that cannot be worn down despite the water around him, to stand above the myopic point of view of critics such as Harold Bloom. The latter was outraged when King won the National Book Award a couple of years ago. And Stephen King continues to find his work published in The New Yorker, the best literary magazine in the country. So much for those elitist prigs who put him on the level of Dean Koontz and other pulpists. There's one

> barometer I have learned over the years to keep in mind: When a literary critic tells you Stephen King is not literature, that commentary is telling you more about the person making it than anything about Stephen King“ (Based on personal consultation with A. Magistrale, February 3rd 2011).

Harold Bloom wrote that King would hardly become better by incorporating the philosophy of Neoplatonism into his writing. While Neoplatonism is not the subject of this work, the uniqueness with which King, in terms of literature, handles various philosophical, scientific and social theories in contemporary postmodern times will be explored.

1.2 Postmodernism and Literature

Postmodernism is probably the most controversial movement that has taken roots in virtually every aspect of the contemporary cultural life. It is controversial mainly because literature, and culture in general, has always had a tendency to generalize, box and assign labels to cultural periods outside of the specific timeframe. For example, while modernism in literature has its origins in the late 19th and early 20th century, the term came to light in the late 20th century, when it was believed that the period of Postmodernism has taken over the cultural life. Modernism was characterized as a period of general confusion, alienation and isolation of the individual from the outside world. It could be also said about Postmodernism but the general feelings of divergence which has taken place around the turn of the 20th century had escalated to a point where a mere cultural

rupture had turned into a huge rift and general confusion had become fragmentation. The pillars of Modernism had become to crumble and the need for a change had grown more and more pronounced. Steven Connor, in this book called *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism* (2004) writes: "*For postmodernism has indeed shown an extraordinary capacity to renew itself in the conflagration of its demise. One might almost say that the derivative character of postmodernism, the name of which indicates that it comes after something else – modernism, modernity, or the modern – guarantees it an extended tenure that the naming of itself as an ex nihilo beginning might not.*" (p. 15) Naming a literary period inside its timeframe may be perceived as very unconventional, but the social fragmentation has shown itself to escalate beyond the confines of Modernism. As Connor aptly points out, the postmodern era has not been artificially created, as he puts it, *ex nihilo*, but it has rather evolved naturally with the increasing demand for order in today's chaos of a world. Postmodernism as a cultural movement has partly quenched the thirst for stability; it has become the eye of the storm which the world has grown into.

Immersing King in Postmodernism may come across as a daring and questionable choice. Nevertheless, King's fictional corpus appears to strongly encompass several of the most prominent of postmodernist theories. King's work shows signs of several literary practices and scientific theories that have emerged in the literary tradition in recent decades. In his writing, he employs distinct

postmodernist literary techniques, most prominent of them being metafiction, while combining it with various postmodernist scientific and literary theories such as Jacques Lacan's post-structuralist psychoanalytical theories, and Kristeva's concept of intertextuality. That being said, Stephen King constitutes a very unique and unfathomable literary phenomenon.[1]

1.2.1 Metafiction

Metafiction is a concept which has been known in contemporary literary circles for quite some time. It is a literary tendency which shape was defined in 1984, when Patricia Waugh, a professor the Durham University, coined and introduced the concept of metafiction into literature via her book called *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-conscious Fiction* (1984). In Waugh's words, metafiction is:

> a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible functionality of the world outside the literary fictional text (p. 2).

Metafiction is an incredibly complex phenomenon because of its unique flexibility and vast number of modes of application within the

[1] In case you are familiar with these postmodernist (literary, and psycho-linguistic) tendencies, feel free to skip this brief excursion.

context of literature. It is in no way restricted only to contemporary writing. Traces of metafictional approaches can be found in many of the pieces of older literature, such as Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605), or James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1918). However, it is much more prominent in recent fiction.

Waugh identifies three distinct types of metafiction, i.e. the self-begetting novel, surfiction, and fabulation. A self-begetting novel is a narration in which the main character gradually develops up to the point where s/he is the composer of the story itself, thus identifying with the author himself. Surfiction, on the other hand, is a type of a metafictional text where the author incorporates him/herself, or pieces of the extralinguistic reality within a fictional text. And finally, fabulation is a technique which blurs the boundaries between the comic and serious, serious and trivial or reality and fiction (Waugh, 1984, p.14-16). Furthermore; it could be said that metafiction, as a literary construct, can be labelled as paradoxical. It is so because in its core, two very counterproductive phenomena take place. While metafiction strays from traditional forms of writing of the 18th and 19th century realism and early modernism, at the same time it reflects on both. It adopts traditional literary forms of realism while twisting and giving then the feel of existentialism, i.e. the aforementioned alienation and isolation depicted by modernists. The combination of these two literary elements from different literary periods results in a uniquely contradictory paradox which metafiction undoubtedly is.

Metafiction seems to take solid roots in contemporary literary fiction these days mainly because Postmodernism allows this particular form of writing to fully develop. The fragmentation of today's society offers writers who use metafiction a truly unique perspective to voice their concerns and general observations which are manifested in our contemporary culture. Metafiction is a mode of writing which many contemporary authors adopted, and it has the capacity to create very interesting, truly surprising, deeply intellectual, and contemplative fictional scenarios.

1.2.2 Lacan's and Kristeva's Post-structuralist Theories

Psychoanalysis has been one of the cornerstones of psychology for decades, and the need for stability and for the survival of the theory of the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmud Freud, has been accentuated. Contemporary psychology, however, felt the need to keep Freud's theory from being laid to rest for good. Psychologists did so by creating several variations of his psychoanalytic theories. Among the most prominent contemporary psychoanalysts who draw on Freud's ideas while at the same time expanding, reviewing and revising them, was a French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Lacan was also inspired by structuralist philosophers and in his theory he combined both concepts in creating a new and unique thesis.

Jacques Lacan constructed a post-structuralist psychoanalysis which was termed the most controversial development in psychology since the theory of Sigmund Freud. He incorporated Freud's ideas of the

unconscious mind, the Oedipus complex, the infant and adult stages of the development of a human being and combined them with structuralist hypotheses.

According to Lacan's theory, there are three distinct realms of thought present, i.e. **the imaginary** also called 'the mirror stage', **the real**, and **the symbolic** (Lacan, 1977, p.25). The mirror stage constitutes early childhood as well as it encompasses a modified version of Freud's dream theory. It basically incorporates a human being as a child or in a child-like state, until the child is able to distinguish objects of the extralinguistic reality including the self. Until then, the child is only aware of the self while looking in the mirror, hence the term mirror stage. On the other hand, as Lacan puts it, the real

> became that before which the imaginary faltered, that over which the symbolic stumbles, that which is refractory, resistant. Hence the formula: "the real is the impossible." It is in this sense that the term begins to appear regularly, as an adjective, to describe that which is lacking in the symbolic order, the ineliminable residue of all articulation, the foreclosed element, which may be approached, but never grasped: the umbilical cord of the symbolic. (Lacan, 1977, p. 36)

The realm of the real is therefore illusive. Human beings have the urge to achieve the real, thus the impossible, but in their zeal to reach the objective truth, they are just grasping for straws. „*While the symbolic always attempts to capture the real, it never can; for it is always only a substitute*" (Homer, 2006, p. 34).

The symbolic is a realm which a child achieves when it becomes aware of the self and the exralinguistic reality around itself. While the imaginary is a realm of plentitude (a child gets what it wants), the child's demands grow as it grows and mere idleness of the child is not sufficient enough for the child to meet its needs. The feeling of lacking is more and more prominent, and because of this, the child has to adopt the medium of language for the purposes of better getting to its goal. It could be said that objective reality serves as a stationary element which human beings hope to attain through the medium of language, the symbolic realm, in spite of the fact that it is impossible to achieve. Lacan explains this phenomenon using Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex. When a child becomes self-conscious, it stops being so fixated on the mother because it realizes that its mother is not all powerful because she lacks a phallus, and therefore it turns to the father. This is the reason why the status of the mother is demoted. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the phallus does not constitute only a penis, as was first theorized by Freud, but it is rather representative of something else as well. A child loses its fixation on the mother because it achieves the symbolic realm and is no longer dependent on the mother because it starts using language. The phallus thus becomes a symbol of everything, every desire the child is struggling to gain.

Language is the key component which binds the renewed psychoanalytic notions together. The realm of the imaginary is not only the domain of the child but also of adults. It is the place where

dreams are being realized. According to Freud, dreams are constructed of broken images which represent our hidden desires. Freud divided them into images which are condensed or displaced. Lacan went a bit father in suggesting that the condensed images are in fact substitutes for something else, thus they have the properties of metaphors in writing; and that the displaced images have the properties of metonymy. And because dreams are the product of the unconscious mind, it led his to his famous premise, that the unconscious is structured like language (McAfee, 2004, p. 31).

Julia Kristeva, a Bulgarian philosopher, linguist and literary scholar, widely draws on, revises, and expands Lacanian psychoanalysis, combining it with her notion on intertextuality in writing. While she concurs with Lacan regarding the unconscious mind being structured like language, she adds the notion that writing consists of analogies and connections and so does interpretation. Thus, the imaginary realm which Lacan came up with, is also open to interpretation. This goes along with her notion of intertextuality which basically argues that the author is not the creator of his/her own text but rather only a conduit through which other writers express the ideas embedded in the mind of the former. The same goes for the latter of course. Is essence, the textual information which a writer creates does not come from his/her psyche but rather from the ideas expressed in a pre-existent and previously read text. Therefore, it could be said that a text becomes "*a permutation of*

texts, an intertextuality in the space of a given text," in which "*several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another*" (Kristeva, 1980.p. 36). So when a writer creates a work of fiction, it is always only a cultural artifact which is a distorted reflection which is drawn from the pool of the 'collective textual unconscious'.

2 Deconstructing the Twin Realities: Stephen King's Use of Metafictional Systems in "Secret Window, Secret Garden", "Umney's Last Case", and *The Dark Half*

Stephen King may be perceived as a popular novelist; however, this book focuses on the idea that King could be considered a postmodernist author on the basis of the use of metafictional elements as key components in some of his fictional writing. A vast majority of critics perceive King only as a writer who twists and pushes the boundaries of reality and, on the basis of this, creates literary fiction using the basic elements of Gothicism. But if King's work is put to the test and measured against the concept of metafiction, the results may be surprising. Furthermore, for the purposes of establishing Stephen King as a metafictional writer, his works of art analyzed below are measured against one of the most prototypical academically acclaimed metafictional writes in the world, Paul Auster.

What King does in his fiction is not just the mere active reconstruction of objective reality, but rather, it is the reconstruction of literary fiction itself. In her study *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-conscious Fiction*, Patricia Waugh poses a question: "Is telling stories telling lies" (87)? Metafictional constructs operate on the principle which allows fiction to cast serious doubt on the reality of the fiction itself; in other words, it blurs the boundary between two universes, namely, fiction and reality. Metafiction,

therefore, destabilizes the traditional relation between fiction and reality by allowing fiction to permeate the firm barrier which has been established amidst this interplay of real vs. fictional. What emerges from this interconnection is a blurry composite constructed of twin realities. In addition, Waugh suggests that the two worlds are codependent although not entirely equal in their importance. It is so because while objective reality could exist independently of the fictional universe, it is not attainable vice versa.

This article deals with the fact that Stephen King not only reweaves reality but also deconstructs fiction. In terms of Waugh, the reality which is the truth becomes level with fiction which initially, as non-metafictional literature exhibits, bares the properties of the 'lie' and, in King's hands, becomes the truth. King, as well as other postmodernist writers, in some cases, explores, and what is more important to this context, undermines his own position as a writer. He does so by the means of metafiction. In combination with his unique talent to pierce the veil of human consciousness to find phobic pressure points where fear, as one of the strongest human emotions, lies, his metafictional writing becomes somewhat different.

King completely ignores traditional forms of metafiction and instead of them offers his readers entirely singular metafictional systems. Ranging from fused traditional forms of metafiction to entirely unorthodox and novel ones, King achieves not only the complete reinvention of the genre of horror fiction but of the novel

itself. It is because his approach is so non-traditional and is quite disjointed from postmodernist literary conventions, that new terminology has to be introduced into Waugh's traditional forms of metafiction (the self-begetting novel, surfiction and fabulation being the most prominent ones). This chapter analyzes three of King's most prototypical metafictional works which fall into three distinct categories, namely psychogenic metafiction ("Secret Window, Secret Garden"), transpositional metafiction ("Umney's Last Case") and corporeal metaficion (*The Dark Half*).

All of the mentioned novels operate on postmodernist literary conventions but they principally differ from one another, hence the categories. What they have in common though, is that they all deal with reality and fiction, truth and 'lies', and they do that by addressing both as one and the same. Because writing comes from truth, as Stephen King emphasized while delivering his acceptance speech when he received The National Book Foundation's Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters, by saying that "*we understand fiction is a lie to begin with. To ignore the truth inside the lie is to sin against the craft, in general, and one's own work in particular*" (King, Acceptance Speeches, online). What King very aptly points out is that, while he acknowledges that literary fiction is grounded in imagination, it also operates on principles of truth which are grounded in reality as perceived by the author.

This very statement which predicates that there is truth within the medium of fiction is the reason for Stephen King's decision to

have written these three unique, horrifying, and strangely rational, yet becoming pieces of writing. As he puts it, "*I never truckled, I never lied. I told the truth. And that's always been the bottom line for me. The story and the people in them may be make-believe but I have to ask myself over and over if I've told the truth*" (King, Acceptance Speeches, online).

2.1 Psychogenic Metafiction

In the preface to one of King's most complex psychological metafictional pieces "Secret Window, Secret Garden", he comments on the process of making not only this particular novelette, but also the construction of fiction in general. He declares that he got the idea for this novelette when looking out of an upstairs laundry room window and seeing a small abandoned garden. He quickly makes the experience into an elaborate metaphor by saying that

> It's an area [the garden] I see just about every day…but [this time] the *angle* was new. The phrase which occurred to me was, of course, the title of this story. It seemed to me as good a metaphor for what writers – especially writers of fantasy – do with their days and nights. Sitting down at the typewriter or picking up a pencil is a physical act; the spiritual analogue is looking out of an almost forgotten window [...] a window which offers a common view from entirely different angle [...] an angle which renders the common extraordinary. The writer's job is to gaze through that window and report on what he sees. But sometimes windows break. I think that, more than anything else, is the concern of this story: what happens to the wide-eyed observer when

> the window between reality and unreality breaks and the glass begins to fly (King 2)?

For King, the act of writing is an art but what is more important here is the statement which King tries to make, not only of this story, but of art itself. What King emphasizes here is that the window, therefore, the writer's psyche constitutes a lens through which reality is perceived. The truth becomes a lie when it is engaged and explored in written discourse. The question he poses at the end completely destabilizes this traditional literary notion and explores deeper concerns. When a window, i.e. the writer's psyche breaks, the consequences are potentially destructive, which is exactly what the theme of "Secret Window, Secret Garden" is about. It is not merely fiction that is at play in this story; what truly lies at the heart of "Secret Window, Secret Garden", and any other metafictional piece of writing, is the overlap of two conflicting, and competing, realities.

In the context of metafictional practice though, the metaphor deepens even farther because the sole fabric of reality is called into question. Therefore, we could transform King's question into the following form: What happens to an observer when the barrier between reality and literary fiction is either thin or simply disappears? This is also one of the themes which are hidden within the story itself.

The observer becomes the reader who, if he or she realizes the truth behind the fiction, comes to question not only the plot or the stories' characters but the written artifact itself. The reader thus

notices the connections, the pressure points which draw objective reality into the work of fiction which destabilizes and undermines the fiction itself, rendering it obsolete. The fiction then becomes a hybrid; a metafictional text, which has the properties of both reality and fiction alike. The reader's realization that the story has strong ties not only to particular objects of extralinguistic reality but also in reference to itself as a work of fiction, is the art of metafiction par excellence. And it is exactly what King in this novelette does.

"Secret Window, Secret Garden" explores the psyche and the psyche-induced actions of a mentally traumatized writer called Morton Rainey. The mental trauma which his main character endures is induced by Rainey catching his beloved wife in bed with her lover, with whom she, after filing for divorce, engages in a romantic relationship. The story begins several months after this incident with Morton Rainey living alone in a lake house in Maine. At the beginning of the story the main character is visited by the antagonist of the story called John Shooter, who immediately accuses Rainey of plagiarism and claims that he has stolen his story and the only thing he wants from Rainey is for him to fix the ending to his story. Rainey automatically rejects the accusation. It turns out that Rainey's story called "Sowing Season" and Shooter's story called "Secret Window, Secret Garden", are nearly identical, after which Shooter proposes a three day ultimatum. If Rainey can deliver proof that he has written the story before Shooter, than he backs off. During the three day period, the protagonist is under a great deal of stress motivated by

Shooter. Shooter's attacks gradually escalate and are concluded by him killing Rainey's cat with a screwdriver, burning down his former house as well as killing his friend and handy man. What is particularly noteworthy is that the handy man is the only one who goes by when Rainey and Shooter are having a conversation outside the lake house and subsequently claims that Rainey was there by himself. After the death of the handy man, it becomes apparent that something is amiss in the story. Shooter has a conversation with Rainey where he acknowledges that he is only a reflection of his psyche; nothing more than a mere manifestation of his disturbed unconscious mind. It turns out that Rainey's psychological trauma has run a lot deeper than he was willing to admit to himself. The anger and frustration resulting from his inadequacy in maintaining a functional relationship with his wife has taken its toll and caused Rainey's malformed psyche to invent a whole new persona – John Shooter.

The character of Shooter is constructed very elaborately. He is an embodiment of memorial fragments which had been transferred from Rainey's consciousness and embedded deep within his unconscious mind. Shooter is an older man with a southern accent, who comes from Mississippi and he wears a dark hat. Shooter is a combination of literary and cultural references, past and present events, and acquaintances experienced and met by Rainey. He serves as both a blessing and a curse to him. Since Rainey's Superego, his conscience, is incapable of acting on his unconscious Id (in this case

his aggressive urges), he invents a persona to do the bidding of his clearly prevailing Id for him. Throughout the story, Rainey identifies with Shooter only partly at first, mainly through the medium of written discourse, which plays a key role in the development of the protagonist's psychological breakdown. Towards the end of the novelette, Shooter fully takes over Rainey's conscious mind and attempts to kill his wife and her lover. Rainey's consciousness thus basically subsides into the depths of his own psyche and the apparition of Shooter becomes the driving force behind Rainey's actions. It could be asked why, when Shooter is a manifestation of Rainey's subconscious mind, does he torture him so much? In other words, how come Rainey's subconscious mind allows his other persona to act aggressively against himself?

Calling forth another persona seems to be a preemptive action. It appears to be so, due to the fact that the subconscious mind is the paragon of mental health and protection. Although in Rainey's case, it becomes counterproductive. It has to create the other (Shooter) and destroy the original one. So, the aggressive behavior of the other towards Rainey is an attempt of the subconscious mind, however unsuccessful, to harden the latter's mental defenses while giving way to the overeager Id. The ineffectiveness of this subconscious action and the need for unity of mind results in the prevalence of the Other[2]

[2] The **O**ther is a term borrowed from Lacanian post-structuralist psychoanalysis, and is used from here on as a reference to one's unconscious representation of the *symbollic order*, among others.

– in Darwinian terms, the fittest, who Shooter undoubtedly is, survives.

The practice of metafiction in this novelette is apparent in several places and it can be found in several different forms. First of all, this story is a kind of a meta-metafiction because the primary metafiction is realized through the character of Rainey being a writer, which in itself is the undermining of the author's status as the looming shadow presence who has subtly presented dominant power over his fiction. What is more interesting is the mixture of varieties of metafiction which King very carefully and deliberately uses in this novelette.

What further destabilizes the narrative is King's mastery of the third person narration which is in no way omniscient as it is a custom in this type of storytelling, but it rather adopts the position of the 1st person narration. The hybridization of the two most common types of narration results in a uniquely claustrophobic atmosphere. While the reader follows the account of Morton Rainey's life from the point of view of the 3rd person, at the same time, s/he also suffers from the narrow viewpoint which is characterized by the story revolving only around the character of Rainey. Furthermore, the reader is given the information from the outside world, which encompasses objects of Rainey's outer reality. The outside world in this story is not only predicated on objective reality but Rainey's conscious thoughts as well. The thoughts of the main character are presented alongside objective reality, thus rendering them a part of this reality. All of the

metafictional aspects of this story are bipolar, Platonic constructs; therefore, they are comprised of two distinct worlds. In this case, it is the world which Rainey's consciousness experiences as well as the consciousness itself. The other world constitutes the seemingly dormant and narratively implicit subconscious mind of Rainey and Shooter as well. Regarding the employment of hybridization in narration in this particular novelette, the metafiction can be also seen in the act in which written discourse reaches out to the reader, who cannot do anything but identify with the main character. In other words, the world of truth and the world of lies merge together into one reality.

Above all metafictional aspects, the most important issue which this story brings forth is the question of reality itself. As it was mentioned above, metafiction is grounded in the theory that there is only one real world which is comprised of two equally true realities, namely extralinguistic reality and literary fiction. These two worlds coincide and exist side by side, and interact through the act of reading. What King achieves in "Secret Window, Secret Garden" is a kind of a nebulous state of reality, where dreams and reality merge into one world where they interact. The two worlds are represented by Rainey's subconscious (the center of dreams) and conscious mind (the center of the perception of reality). In the course of the story, Rainey tries to remember several of the events and objects of extralinguistic reality which are somehow tied to his unconscious invention of the persona of Shooter. These memorial fragments are

hard to recall because "*his memory of the event* [is] *quite foggy*" (43). Memories are very important aspects of this story. The protagonist gradually begins to question the authenticity of his own recollections: "*Mort took no notice, confusing her* [his wife's] *real voice with the voice in his mind, which was the voice of a memory. But was it a true memory or a false one? That was the real question, wasn't it? It seemed like a true memory*" (46). The confusion which the protagonist feels here is a representation of the real and the textual world overlapping and starting to form a bridge between the two worlds. Shooter, as an invented persona of a writer, and Rainey start to become one and the same. Until the end of the story Shooter is only a part of the non-textual discourse but it slowly becomes apparent that he is a part of the written discourse as well. When Rainey is visited by his estranged wife towards the end of the story, what he hears in his conscious mind is the first line of Shooter's story "Secret Window, Secret Garden", which is basically the same as his story – "Sowing Season": "*She had stolen his love, and a woman who would steal your love when your love was really all you had to give was not much of a woman*" (99). This is the point of the story when not only John Shooter and Morton Rainey become one whole persona but it also becomes clear that both stories transform into one. The textual information presented in the story seeps into Rainey's reality, the reality within the fiction, which further complicates and mystifies the clear-cut boundary between truth and fiction within this narrative, i.e. the fiction as such. And

because this form of metafictional practice is generated in the character's psyche, the term psychogenic metafiction is appropriate.

Another interesting metafictional aspect of this narrative are the multiple layers of fiction within the medium of fiction. First of all, there may be found fragments of stories embedded within the narrative structure. But this metatextual information is only the tip of the iceberg. When one looks at "Secret Window, Secret Garden" in terms of metafiction, one cannot omit the looming presence not only of the individual layers of narrations but mainly of the complex matrix of characters who had written the novelette "Secret Window, Secret Garden". It is as much about the producers of this written discourse as it is about the title of the story itself. Within the context of this work of fiction, there are five distinct interconnected levels of reality present and they all have a connection to the title of the narrative. Firstly, "Secret Window, Secret Garden" is the name of the story which, as a young man, Morton Rainey plagiarized from his classmate John Kintner. As years went by, he forgot about the incident and pushed the memory to his subconscious mind. Later, he published the story under the name "Sowing Season". The narrative then resurfaced in the form of John Shooter and again adopted the name of its former image.

The last two layers of narration are especially interesting. At the very end of the story, after Morton Rainey is killed, his wife Amy finds a letter from John Shooter. The letter says: "*I am sorry for all the trouble. Things got out of hand. I am going back to my home*

now, I got my story, which is all I came for in the first place. Yours Truly. John Shooter" (112). When this letter is taken into account, it could be suggested that the story which is being read by the recipient – the reader, is the story which was written by John Shooter as the prime mover of this layered metafiction. Shooter thus takes the place of Stephen King himself, and acts as the writer while Stephen King, being the last and final metafictional layer, only establishes a shadow presence. But we may go a little further. The fact that John Shooter leaves a physical remnant of his presence in the literary world suggests that he himself is the author of the original novelette (the literary world from which all subsequent literary worlds of this narrative emerge) performed a metafictional act by writing himself into the confines of the story.

This narrative is unique in many ways but the most noteworthy is King's ability to blur the boundaries between the reader and the main character, Morton Rainey. The true genius of this piece of writing, from a metafictional standpoint, lies in his ability to utterly and consciously undermine his own status as the creator of this work of fiction by completely destroying the veil between reality and fiction, thus identifying himself with the character of John Shooter. Therefore, Stephen King abides by the general rules of metafictional practice to the letter. He also does so by merging two worlds, not only in the setting or the plot, but by making the characters, reader and the writer one and the same thing – one giant simulacrum, which is no less real than its constituents. The novelette "Secret Window,

Secret Garden" ultimately denies the writer any escape from his imagination, which dissolves the line between the real and the imagined, rendering the writer the insane God feared in *Misery's Return*, a novel which the antagonist Annie Wilkes forced the main character Paul Sheldon, in King's novel *Misery* (1987), to create.

2.2 Transpositional Metafiction

In *Misery's Return* Sheldon writes: "*His ideas about God had changed* […] *He had discovered that there was not one God but many, and some were more than cruel---they were insane, and that changed all. Cruelty, after all, was understandable. With insanity, however, there was no arguing*" (King, 310). This comment, in the context of metafictional practice, explores the multiplicity of worlds within other worlds. In this story King explicitly explores the power which the author exorcises and holds with respect to his creation. What this short excerpt from *Misery* states is that authors stand in a god-like position in reference to the whole literary universe, which encompasses space, time, plot, as well as characters. When the fact that through metafiction, the literary universe is perceived as equally realistic to objective reality is taken to account, it could be said that writers, as the creators of worlds parallel to this one, automatically assume a god-like status. As one of the best known academically acclaimed authors of postmodernist fiction, Paul Auster writes in his *Travels in the Scriptorium* (2007) towards the end of the narrative:

> It will never end. For Mr. Blank is one of us now, and struggle though he might to understand his predicament, he will always be lost. I believe I speak for all his charges when I say he is getting what he deserves—no more, no less. Not as a form of punishment, but as an act of supreme justice and compassion. Without him, we are nothing, but the paradox is that we, the figments of another mind, will outlive the mind that made us, for once we are thrown into the world, we continue to exist forever, and our stories go on being told, even after we are dead (64).

Firstly, this story is an account of one (and only one) day in the life of the protagonist Mr. Blank, who relives this day over and over again. This excerpt is from the afterword to the story, the existence of which is credited to the name N.R. Fanshawe, a name of the character in another of Auster's narratives called *The New York Trilogy* (1986). Similarly to King's implicit positioning of the character of John Shooter into the position of the author, therefore himself, does Paul Auster credit and thus identifies himself with his own literary creation, Fanshawe. The literary creations John Shooter and N.R. Fanshawe both assume the god-like position in which the author stands in relation to his/her own literary work, but at the same time they both stand in a character-like position, as is more than apparent in the excerpt from Auster's *Travels in the Scriptorium*. The fact that Fanshawe is the explicit creator of this piece and he also refers to himself with regards to Mr. Blank in the first person singular and plural, suggests the equality of the status of both as mere literary creations of the prime mover, Paul Auster. There is one interesting element which is not present in King's novelette "Secret

Window, Secret Garden" but is present in Auster narrative, and that is the seemingly insignificant status of literary characters in association with the authors themselves. When we assume the position that authors are in a god-like relation to their literary creations, we automatically diminish the status of characters. But as Auster aptly points out in *Travels in the Scriptorium*, the characters of stories continue to exist forever. Therefore, it could be stated that the original position in which characters are inferior to their creators which has been dominant in literature until the emergence of Postmodernism, is nowadays continually reversed. Literary characters thus assume the position of ethereal beings who, although cannot exorcise power over authors, in many cases, they definitely outlive their original makers. This is a concept which Stephen King deconstructs in another one of his prototypical metafictional pieces called "Umney's Last Case". This short story is analyzed here in detail in parallel with Paul Auster's themes incorporated in his *New York Trilogy* as well as *Travels in the Scriptorium*. It is due to the striking thematic similarities with Auster's writing which King employs in his short story.

"Umney's Last Case" follows the story of a private eye in L.A., called Clyde Umney who on a completely ordinary day walks to work. During the walk he notices several unsettling changes in the environment which occur in events, places and characters in a previously perpetual state of existence, such as the newsboy standing on the street corner every day not being there, his favorite bar being

closed, an elevator attendant having to retire after many years of service in the building where Clyde has his office, and many more. After stepping of the elevator at the floor where his office is located, he gets inexplicably agitated at a group of painters painting the lobby. After a short squabble he learns that the building's owner, called Samuel Landry, has given the order to repaint the lobby. Oddly, the name of the owner seems to be unknown to Clyde. The final straw is when he discovers that his secretary, Candy Cane, has left him a letter of resignation. In other words, Clyde's relatively eventful yet monotonous life becomes dominated by chance, which is a concept previously alien to him. The phrase "*confusion, confusion, nothing but confusion*" (King 843) is being frequently repeated throughout the narrative. It becomes the central theme of the story. Shortly after arriving at his office, he is visited by a man. Clyde's reaction takes him by surprise when he states:

> I was scared out of my mind. I've faced blazing guns in the hands of angry men, which is bad, and daggers in the hands of angry women, which is a thousand times worse […] I have even been tossed out of a third-story window. It's been an eventful life, all right, but nothing in it had ever scared me the way the smell of that cologne and that footstep scared me.
> 'Clyde' a voice said. A voice I'd never heard before, a voice I nevertheless knew as well as my own (845).

Furthermore, Clyde grows a lot more concerned when he notices the appearance of the man sitting in his office. The man in the chair has

features which very closely resemble Clyde himself and as it turns out, the man looks exactly like Clyde apart from the age difference. The latter appears to be the spitting image of Clyde. After this unsettling encounter the two men talk a little longer. The tone of the narrative abruptly shifts when the true purpose of the story becomes apparent as is demonstrated by one of the most important subchapters found in the story. The title of this subchapter seems to be speaking for itself.

This fifth subchapter is entitled "*Interview with God*" (847) which is an interesting and quite apt choice of words because the man visiting Clyde introduces himself as Samuel Landry. Landry gradually takes over the conversation and states that he is the creator of Clyde and the world Clyde inhabits, in other words, he is a writer. It turns out that Clyde is the main character in a moderately successful detective series. Trying to persuade Clyde that he is telling the truth, Landry immediately presents several arguments, after which the former tries to attack him out of frustration. Landry assumes domination over the literary character and stops Clyde's advance by typing the actions of his character into his laptop. This finally satisfies Clyde's skepticism. Landry than comes clear over the real reason for plunging into his own creation – his literary world. As it appears, Landry's life in reality has not been so kind to him. His son had died and consequently, he and his wife got divorced. Furthermore, Landry suffers from shingles, which is an incurable and painful disease. Thus the true motives of Clyde's maker begin to take

shape. Landry familiarizes Clyde with his intentions in assuming his place in the literary world, where he believes he can be truly happy. Than without asking for Clyde's consent, Landry assumes the position of the private eye, Clyde Umney and Clyde's consciousness is transferred into reality, therefore, Samuel Landry's body.

This elaborate form of metafiction is a combination of two traditional and one hybridized example of metafictional writing, namely the self-begetting novel, surfiction as well as the aforementioned hybridized form of metafiction previously described in the novelette "Secret Window, Secret Garden" – the multi-layered metafiction. It is so because of the transposition of characters, parallel worlds, and of power interiorized within the position an author holds over his writing.

Primarily, what is particularly striking about this short story is the complex and explicit manner in which King handles metafiction when it comes to the transposing of two worlds – the 'real' and the imaginary. As the character of Landry points out "*writers very rarely plunge all the way into the worlds they've created, and when they do, they end up doing it strictly in their heads, while their bodies vegetate in some mental asylum. Most of us are content simply to be tourists in the country of our imaginations*" (King, 862). What King very clearly asserts here, is that writers of fiction, up until recent decades, had mostly set clear-cut boundaries between reality and the world of imagination and, at best, perceived the merging of literary fiction and reality as falling into the pit of insanity. To illustrate, here

is an excerpt from the famous novel by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra called *Don Quixote*: "*Finally, from so little sleeping and so much reading, his brain dried up and he went completely out of his mind*" (48). As King points out, writers are reluctant to reveal themselves and their art to the general public but he shows that even demystifying literature by self-consciously drawing attention to the imaginary to raise its status and degree of reality, can produce very interesting and complex literary artifacts.

The transposition of literary worlds in "Umney's Last Case" is very closely connected to the shift in the status and degree of power of its characters. By entering his imagination, Landry exorcised his power as the god of this respective universe but by swapping places with Clyde, he automatically and consciously gives up the power and transfers it to Clyde, which is a concept very similar to what Paul Auster attempted in the third part of his *New York Trilogy* called "The Locked Room". The story is about the narrator's search for his lost friend Fanshawe, a writer, who after disappearing and leaving his pregnant wife, leaves his life's work and a note explaining his actions to a friend (the narrator). Fanshawe asks his friend to read his work and in case he deems it worthy, he is supposed to publish it. The narrator does so and he himself writes literary criticism about his stories. By falling in love with Fanshawe's wife and by trying to erase every trace of Fanshawe from his life, however unsuccessfully, the narrator assumes his life and effectively becomes the former. It is even speculated that the narrator is the one who wrote the work

under an assumed name: "*My first response was to laugh.* […] *Did people not trust me to tell the truth? Why would I go to the trouble of creating an entire body of work and then not want to take credit for it?* […] *I realized that once all of Fanshawe's manuscripts had been published, it would be perfectly possible for me to write another book or two under his name*" (Auster, *The New York Trilogy*, 248). To assume someone's life means to become someone else, and just like Rainey becoming Shooter in "Secret Window, Secret Garden", or the narrator gradually becoming Fanshawe in *The New York Trilogy*, in King's "Umney's Last Case," Clyde assumes the life of his creator, Landry. The types of metafiction which are presented in these three narratives differ from one another, yet have one common element. That is, the differentiation of the psyche which can either reconstruct or alienate the self. Furthermore, when Clyde assumes the position of his creator in the 'real' world, he immediately starts thinking like the narrator of "The Locked Room". He starts to read and learn how to write in a style which constitutes the mirror image of his predecessor. But because this has been written by Stephen King, who very often introduces horrific elements to his writing, Clyde in the body of Landry decides to make a living hell out of the newly appointed detective in L.A. In other words, Clyde, in a position of power, takes revenge upon his original creator.

The previously mentioned multiplicity of layers embedded within the metafictional aspects of this story is realized by logical dissimilarities in the textual and physical relation between Clyde and

Landry. The first layer or narration is the connection Umney – Landry. Landry asserts himself as the prime mover when it comes to Clyde but it seems to be untrue. It is so because of Clyde, who is a mere literary character in Landry's twisted imagination, and retains the ability to manifest certain minor thoughts and actions independent of Landry's knowledge. He is, for example, able to resist Landry keeping him at bay by moving just a little and thinking autonomous thoughts. This undermines the primary assumption about Landry being the one who asserts ultimate dominance over Clyde; therefore it implies a prime source of his partial resistance. While Landry appears to have the status of god in the literary world of Clyde, as the latter points out it is "*sort of awful, realizing I had been made by such a bush-league version of God, but it also explained a lot. My shortcomings, mainly*" (King, *Nightmares and Dreamscapes*, 856). Clyde as a creation was made, similar to people, in the image of his maker, but the sole fact that even the creator of the literary world Clyde inhabits is not perfect and all-powerful, undermines his status as the true drive behind the aforementioned world *and* Landry's world as well. King here very subtly incorporates the notion of another layer of metafictional practice, which is embodied in King himself being the prime mover, who controls the actions of Clyde as well as Landry assuming dominance over his character. King then toys with his literary conceptions by reversing the roles of both characters thus brilliantly demonstrating the theory of multiple realities implied by metafiction within the

fiction itself. Although it could be argued that the freedom exhibited by Clyde is only the result of a careless mistake made by Stephen King, it is highly unlikely on the grounds that when it comes to the main theme of his stories, King very rarely makes even the tiniest of mistakes, not to mention a considerable one like this.

2.3 Corporeal Metafiction

The third and last singular form of metafiction employed by King deals with his literary creation coming to life. This literary creation is the protagonist's pseudonym, which is what stands at the core of his metafictional novel. Similarly to King's *The Dark Half* (1989), in Paul Auster's "The Locked Room", the narrator's thoughts begin to wander and he starts to think about passing his work under the name of Fanshawe, he contemplates the intricacies of using a pseudonym: "*What it means when a writer puts his name on the book, why some writers choose to hide behind a pseudonym, whether or not a writer has a real life anyway*" (238). These and several other points which Auster during the course of the story uses are being frequently posed by many authors. Writers often use pseudonyms but very rarely comment on it.

In the early 80's, Stephen King attempted a literary deception, where he published several of his novels under a pseudonym, Richard Bachman. He did this in an effort to extinguish the embers of his uncertainty: he was questioning his literary success and wanted to know which one of two possibilities was responsible for his

accomplishment. He basically wanted to know whether it was talent or luck which had been standing behind his huge success as a writer of literary fiction. As King himself states that he has "*yet to find an answer to the 'talent vs. luck' question*" (King, *Thinner,* 2) as Bachman's true identity as King was revealed quite soon. As Richard Bachman, King published several novels including *Rage* (1977), *Thinner* (1984), *Blaze* (2007), *The Long Walk* (1979) and *The Running Man* (1982). After a short period of moderate success, fans noticed the similarities between the authors. A book clerk from Washington D.C., Steven Brown, discovered the similarities and went to the library of congress to uncover the truth about the Bachman books. Later, he contacted King's publisher and was then contacted by King himself who offered him the chance to write an article about him uncovering Bachman's true identity. As King announces in the foreword to his Bachman novel *Thinner,* Bachman "*died*" in 1985 of "*cancer of the pseudonym*" (3). There is one more thing worth mentioning, namely that King's pseudonym, Richard Bachman, adopted his own pseudonym which he "*had used to write* The Fifth Quarter *under the name of John Swithen*" (King, *Blaze*, 4).

This literary simulacrum led to the conception of one of the most important literary pieces when it comes to the employment of metaficion in King's literary corpus. The forward to King's novel *The Dark Half* is very short and concise but, in actuality, it speaks volumes. King pays homage to his literary pseudonym by writing that he is "*indebted to Richard Bachman for his help and inspiration.*

This novel could not have been written without him" (1). Admitting the use and inspiration by his own literary creation in itself suggests the involvement of this particular theme which dominates the novel. *The Dark Half* is representative of merging serious postmodernist tendencies with horror fiction and creating a hybridized form of metaficion utterly unique to literature as well as King's own writing.

In contrast to "Secret Window, Secret Garden", which deconstructs the destructive influence writing could have on the psyche of an author, and "Umney's Last Case" which examines the relation between the literary universe and objective reality, *The Dark Half* incorporates the literary universe inside extralingustic reality by introducing the concept of the horrific Other. It also scrutinizes writing as an art of creating and suggests the fragmentation of the self.

The story follows a moderately successful writer Thad Beaumont, who is one day visited by the police who accuse him of murder. Thad has an airtight alibi but the police doubt it very much because it turns out that the murderer left Thad's fingerprint at the scene of the crime. It is also crucial to note that Thad had a twin brother whom he dissolved in utero. After diagnosing him with a form of cancer, the doctors discover some undissolved parts of Thad's unborn brother lodged in his brain. Thad is "*a novelist with a dual career, one under his own name as a critically respected but unpopular novelist*" (Grace, 63), and another under an assumed name, a pseudonym, George Stark who is the supposed author of a

very popular and critically unnoticed crime novels. After enjoying thirteen years of success as George Stark, Thad, influenced by a fan's discovery of the similarities between his and Stark's literary style, decides to 'out' himself to the general public by staging a 'funeral' for his literary double. After this event, two very important things happen. Firstly, the killings which the novel centers on start right after the funeral. Secondly, the metaphorical killing of his literary pseudonym coincides with Thad getting writer's block. He is unable to write anything but his diary which is mostly written in a very impersonal and saccharin style. One day, Thad is called to the cemetery and sees a hole dug from inside in front of the fictional grave in which George Stark was figuratively buried. Right after that, the killings start. Later in the course of the story, it turns out that the murderer is none other than George Stark himself, a literary pseudonym which comes to life. Stark's figurative burial and his ultimate acquisition of a corporeal form results in a gradually escalating series of murders of people associated with Thad's isolation as a writer who no longer depends on the work of his pseudonym. This leads to the inevitable final literary battle in which Stark, as a corporeal entity created entirely out of written discourse, tries to learn how to write from Thad, thus attempting to gain full autonomy. Since Stark is a part of Thad, at the end the latter has no choice but to give up his greatest passion which is writing and thus destroying Stark once and for all.

King's statement in the preface of *The Dark Half* clearly determines that his own pseudonym was the source of inspiration for the novel. The metafictional aspect of this novel is very clear and concise. A purely literary creation coming to life is a fully developed hybridized form of metafiction. Combining certain aspects of the self-begetting novel and adding the elements of horror into it, results in the creation of an entirely separate form of metafiction, termed corporeal metafiction. It is realized through the pseudonym attaining, in spite of his fictionality, a certain degree of reality. Stark, although in corporeal, instead of an ethereal state in which literary characters may be found, is nevertheless dependent upon Thad's creative genius. He lives from his imagination. Until his burial, Stark was no less real than he was after that, and he served as Thad's other persona, much like John Shooter was the Other to Mort Rainey. When writing as George Stark, Thad has had no control over himself, he:

> sometimes believed that the compulsion to make fiction was no more than a bulwark against confusion, maybe even insanity. It was a desperate imposition of order by people able to find that precious only in their minds…never in their hearts.
> Inside him a voice whispered for the first time: 'Who are you when you write, Thad? Who are you then?'
> And for that voice he had no answer (128-9).

By assuming a certain amount of realization that Stark is present in Thad's mind, the latter willingly admits to himself the fact that

through the medium of written discourse, his self becomes alienated from objective reality and the self as well: Thad's psyche becomes fragmented to the point where the Other, his dark half, assumes power over writing, but through Thad's imagination. The fact that Thad has no answer for his inner voice (Stark's voice) suggests that he does not question, and only passively accepts his self-splitting. And by subsequently laying Stark to rest, he assumes a corporeal form out of the power of Thad's imagination.

Another striking aspect of this novel is when Thad sees Stark for the first time and notices his appearance: "*They looked nothing alike.*[…] *Thad was slim and darkish, Stark broad-shouldered and fair in spite of his tan* […] *Yet they were mirror images, just the same*" (426). Stark, though an embodiment of Thad's brother who was dissolved in utero, bears very little physical resemblance to Thad, yet as Thad notices later, Stark not only looks but also acts exactly how he imagined the protagonist in the Stark novels, Alexis Machine, would. When Thad contemplates the possibility of the murdering double being the embodiment of his own pseudonym, he questions his own sanity because "*George Stark was not real, and neither was Alexis Machine, that fiction within fiction. Neither of them had ever existed, any more than George Eliot had ever existed, or Mark Twain, or Lewis Carroll, or Tucker Coe, or Edgar Box. Pseudonyms were only a higher form of fictional character*" (161). The name Stark was also borrowed by King. It was the pseudonym of a famous writer of crime novels originally called Donald E.

Westlake. By creating a character inspired by an actual person, King "*further fictionalizes his fictional fiction*" (Grace, 64). He interconnects three worlds and remakes them into one whole – the world of the novel *The Dark Half*.

Stephen King handles life and death of his antagonist in a very similar manner as it was done by Paul Auster in his "The Locked Room". The narrator of Auster's story first assumed Fanshawe's life and then tried to erase every trace of him from his life, but he gradually becomes obsessed with finding Fanshawe and decides to look for him. In the same way, Thad seems to be obsessed with Stark and in a manner akin to the narrator of Auster's story, tries to erase traces of him, but he is unable to do so. Furthermore, this attempt occurs involuntarily, therefore there is no proof of Thad's positive reaction to this event which impacts his life in a major way. The same goes for Stark's coming to life. It is also an event which is forced upon Thad and while he wants to get rid of his murdering Other, he is also reluctant to do so, because he realizes that getting rid of Stark means giving up writing. This need for writing, thus this "*attraction to Stark*" is akin to "*alcohol or drug addiction*" (Meyer 111).

Stark and Thad are both codependent upon each other and this relationship is strongly realized near the end of the story. Stark is a creature compiled entirely out of words; he is the physical representation of the protagonist of the Stark novels, Alexis Machine. But while Stark is unable to exist independently of Thad's

imagination, and thus is tied to Thad's ability to write, Thad himself is able to function without him ever writing, because addiction is treatable. It is also because Stark assumes a corporeal form of Thad's dead brother that Stark tries to achieve autonomy by trying to absorb Thad's ability to write in the same manner in which Thad's absorbed his twin brother in utero. By successfully assimilating Thad's ability to write, Stark could be able to manage independence.

Thus, the medium of writing is presented as a potentially destructive as well as constructive and remedial force. It is the thing which is able to reintegrate the parts of the self which were scattered by the self-splitting of Thad's persona into a coherent whole. However, Stark is unsuccessful and subsequently destroyed but at the cost of Thad giving up what he loves to do most, to write.

The ending of the novel is rather pessimistic. Although Stark is destroyed, the experience leaves Thad utterly distraught because since he has given up writing, his self becomes a whole but he has lost his life's purpose. Thad's inability to write after Stark's disappearance is due to the continuation of his writer's block about which King gives very little indication whether it is broken or not. However, the epigraph of the novel shows a part of Thad's earlier novel. It is a scene in which two lovers part, and that ultimately denies a happy ending. But what is more important is that it indicates that Thad no longer possesses the ability to write. This renders the whole concept of writing mute, at least in this case. What King suggests here is that written discourse, wherever it comes from,

comprises of "*twin realities – the one in the real world and the one in the manuscript world*" (201). And losing the world of imagination, the dark half of the self, means losing the ability to write.

3 Lacan, King, and the Postmodern (Human) Condition

Fiction as such, and horror fiction in particular, have always had an affinity for, and thus and have been dominated by the complexities of the human mind. The predominant tendency in the macabre part of literature has been the science of psychoanalysis. Horror fiction has used this branch of psychology to heighten the fear represented by this type of fiction as well as expand the scope of themes employed within its confines. No matter what monstrosities have been presented, the authors of horror fiction have consistently tied their horrific creations to imagination. Having said that, the human psyche acquired the status of a bipolar existence, a Platonic concept in which the dark motivations subsiding the depts of the mind have been continually exposed and examined. With the emergence of post-structuralist psychoanalysis constructed by Jacques Lacan and other psychologists and sociologists, the primary concept of the self shifted and reconstructed itself into the form we know today - the fragmented human psyche. The initial Platonic concept of the human mind has become divided into an infinite number of possible universes, so to speak. In other words, the human psyche has been fragmented into a partially reformed or altogether non-reconstructable phenomenon. This postmodernist concept of a fragmented and disillusioned human being is presented in Stephen King´s reflection of Lacanian post-structuralist psychoanalysis.

The literary body of work of Stephen King reflects the tendency of these post-structuralist psychoanalytic notions to permeate the written discourse. Instead of dwelling on the romantic tradition that has characterized horror fiction since its birth, King's writing remarkably mirrors several postmodernist theories, such as metafiction, intertextuality, as well as the aforementioned contemporary form of psychoanalysis. By employing these concepts into horror fiction, most notably Lacanian post-structuralist psychoanalysis, at least so it seems, King completely destroys the original shape of horror fiction, remaking it into something truly extraordinary. By doing so, King gives it a much needed injection of renewal. The idea of a monstrosity being "*merely the product of our repressed and projected fears and desires*" (Freud, 2003, p. 241), therefore the anxieties which inhabit the human psyche are thus transformed and placed into the subject of literary fiction. In King´s hands though, these anxieties are centered predominantly in the literary characters of writers. This very fact gives King's fiction literary merit because it automatically refers to the phenomenon of metafiction, which is definitely the prevailing technique used in contemporary, postmodernist literary fiction.

As it has been previously established, the practice of metafiction dominates the literary landscape of postmodernism, and immersing some of King's prototypical postmodernist narratives in it constitutes the first step in establishing him as an interesting and valuable figure of high-culture literature. In several of the above introduced

narratives as well as several that haven't been analyzed yet, King creates a truly horrifying picture of the fragmentation of the self associated with the medium of writing. The works "Secret Window, Secret Garden", *The Dark Half*, and *The Shining* represent a culmination of his Postmodernist aspirations. In them, he combines metafiction which he binds with contemporary Lacanian post-structuralist psychoanalytical notions and the result is a genuinely unique literary corpus germane to horror fiction as well as literature itself.

First of all, the horrors encompassed in a majority of King's metafictional writing are presented as "*formal linguistic problems*" (Bruhm, 1998, p. 77). As Lacan himself states, the portion of the human mind where the unconscious dwells, contains "*the whole structure of language*" (Lacan, 1977, p. 147). Lacan talks about the symbolic stage from which the mind digresses in its zeal to futilely grasp the real world, thus the unattainable. When considering Bruhm's and Lacan's premises, it may be concluded that the linguistic problems that King's characters must face in the course of the aforementioned stories are symptomatic of the crisis of the self, in other words, the continuous self-splitting of a persona. This fragmentation of the self, and predominantly the male self, is in harmony with Lacan's theory of the Oedipus complex. The horrors which are the main subject of King's narratives are presented as semi-corporeal at best, and are always somehow tied to the written discourse which is embodied in language – the symbolic. The

characters of King's metafictional novels are always the conduits, mediums through which language, in whatever form it is presented, is realized. They are the metaphorical representation of what Lacan calls the real. It is so, because the art of writing is first and foremost the art of bringing images and events from the conscious as well the unconscious mind on paper using language. Therefore, it could be said that writers effectually serve as semi-permeable barriers between the imaginary (the unheard unconscious) and the symbolic which is the artificially linguistically reconstructed content of the imagination.

3.1 Through the Looking Glass

The Shining represents this very phenomenon of discourse being transferred from the realm of the imaginary into the symbolic, which King mixes with Lacan's theory of the "mirror child." This is a story about a traditional family of a writer, Jack Torrence, who has a writer's block and subsequently takes a job as a caretaker of the Overlook hotel during the winter. The hotel is isolated because of the massive amount of snow and the family stays there throughout the whole season. The Overlook is an embodiment of death, sorrow and despair. It is the pit in which all negative energy associated with the hotel itself is sucked into. The hotel is riddled with many ghosts but what is important is that the corruptive force of the spectral manifestations is limited only to the caretakers of the hotel. Jack Torrence's mind slowly becomes clouded by the haunting spirits of

the Overlook and at the end of the story, he unsuccessfully tries to kill his own family. However, the focus in this chapter is put on Jack's six year old son, Danny.

The objects of the horrific, the conscious fears which people exhibit, are in King's postmodernist fiction always first represented as part of the written discourse. In one of King's most famous novels, *The Shining*, the most terrifying concept known to the protagonist's, "*Danny Terrence's life was DIVORCE, a word that always appeared in his mind as a sign printed in red letters which were covered with hissing, poisonous snakes*," (King, 2001, p.27) not to mention the continuing appearance of "*the blackness where one sinister word flashed in red: REDRUM*." (p. 57) Though not a writer, Danny is taught to read by his father and has quite a bit of difficulty with it. In Lacanian terms, his unconscious is able to partially understand the threat incorporated in the discourse of the words DIVORCE and REDRUM, but his conscious mind is unable to linguistically grasp the concept of both words. Furthermore, Danny sees the word REDRUM only in the mirror and it is shown to him by one of the Overlook specters, Tony.

This is an interesting concept when it comes to post-structuralist psychoanalysis and Lacan's "mirror stage" – the realm of the imaginary in particular. Though Danny is about three years older when Lacan's mirror child, the similarities are truly astounding. First of all, Danny appears to be at the brink of immersing himself to the desired symbolic realm when it comes to the written discourse. He is

able to function cognitively on the level of speech, but not yet writing. Secondly, King uses the symbol of the mirror, same as Lacan, quite literally, but also symbolically. The image in the mirror is not of Danny, but that of Tony and REDRUM instead. It seems to represent Danny's unconscious mind, the realm of the imaginary, where the desires as well as threats are registered. The word REDRUM is the word MURDER spelled backwards. It becomes clear that the image in the mirror really is the reflection of Danny's unconscious mind where concepts are realized but not linguistically perceived. Danny indeed becomes agitated with the word he sees in the mirror because he cannot yet grasp it in the confines of the symbolic realm and thus pass it into his conscious and linguistically expressible mind. Although it could be argued that Danny, unlike other protagonists of King's metafictional novels, is not a writer, therefore he is not tied to the symbolic realm in a way like the other characters, the opposite is the truth. It could be said that Danny is the one who is equally, if not more, tied to the symbolic realm despite his detractions when it comes to the physical act of reading. He possesses the ability to 'shine,' which is basically the ability to read the conscious and unconscious thoughts of others. Danny thus becomes the only one who is able to tap directly into the symbolic realm of others and therefore, to read the signifiers of another person's mind.

3.2 Trouble in the Signifying Chain

The similarities between King and Lacan continue to arise when the frequent and vivid portrayal of King's metafictional characters, i.e. authors struggling with writer's block, is considered. Jacques Lacan dares the reader to "*ask the writer about the anxiety that he experiences when faced by the blank sheet of paper and he will tell you who is the real turd of his fantasy.*" (Lacan, 1977, p. 315) Countless of King's fictional characters are plagued by the anxiety Lacan mentions, but two in particular stand up from the swirling vortex of despair which King's metafictional practice seems to be. Thad Beaumont from *The Dark Half* and Morton Rainey from the novelette "Secret Window, Secret Garden" are both authors which experience this anxiety. The pressure bearing down on them is too much to carry alone; therefore they both call forth another aspect of Lacanian psychoanalysis, which is the appearance of the Other as a contrast to the self as embodied in the human consciousness.

The self and the other are common concepts in contemporary philosophy, sociology and psychology as well, although they differ in each of the respective sciences. While philosophy talks about interpersonal relations, sociology talks about the division in social roles of one particular human being, but what is most important is how psychology views this bipolar relation of the self to the other. Postmodern psychoanalysis talks about this relation in narrow terms of alienation and fragmentation of the self into many parts of the self. What Lacan suggests is that the Other here is a representation of the

fragmented parts of the human psyche. This is also presented in Stephen King's literary fiction in a form of Thad's and Rainey's unconscious projection realized by the projection of the Other, namely George Stark and John Shooter. Steven Bruhm suggests that "*what is really at stake in The Dark Half is what Lacan calls the agency of the letter in the unconscious, the way self-referentiality inscribes the self by only doubling, fragmenting and killing the self*" (Bruhm, 1998, p. 78). What Bruhm tries to tell us, is that in order to break the writer's block, Thad's unconscious unwillingly brings forth the literary pseudonym of George Stark to life, which in itself suggests the fragmentation mentioned. When Lacan talks about the turd of a writer's fantasy, it becomes apparent he is referring to the Other. In the case of *The Dark Half*, George Stark represents the corporeal embodiment of the Other. Thad's complete detachment from the self is reflected in King's description of the appearance of his diary:

> Thad Beaumont did not keep anything resembling an organized journal, but he did sometimes write about the events in his own life which interested, amused or frightened him. He kept these accounts in a bound ledger […] most were strangely passionless, almost as if part of him was standing aside and reporting on his life with his own divorced and almost disinterested eye (King, 2009c, p. 82).

Thad's fragmentation of the self is presented in its best right here. The protagonist's disillusionment with his own social roles as a

father, husband, and a writer in particular is symptomatic of the self-splitting which is later realized through the persona of George Stark, who is not the embodiment of the fragmented self. Though he calls himself George Stark, he is only a conduit for Stark's fictional creation, Alexis Machine, who is the true agency of the written discourse responsible for the writer's complete withdrawal from the self and the outside world as well.

The same can be said for the persona of John Shooter, who is the Other, the embodied self-split, further fragmented and irreparably damaged self of Morton Rainey. Rainey falls prey to the anxiety experienced by not just a regular person but the repeated user of the written discourse, and creator of worlds parallel to objective reality. What King tries to state here is that the act of fragmentation of the self is the result of "*documentation, of the act of writing, and of representing the self*." (Bruhm, 1998, p. 79) Unlike Morton Rainey, whose fragmentation lead to the aforementioned killing of the self by letting the persona of John Shooter (the Other) to fully take control over the self, Thad Beaumont saves himself in time but at the cost of his ability to write. In other words, Thad is "*ripped apart by the symbolic order*." (Bruhm, 1998, p. 79) This is the literal representation of Lacan's attempt at describing the postmodern human condition. King very skillfully portrays the self-splitting not only of writers, but also of each and every human being. As the German philosopher Maarten Doorman stated: "*the belief in an authentic 'I' led to the discovery of the subconscious; the imperative*

of self-realization led to the awareness of alienation" (Doorman, 2004, p.1). The gradual progression of the exploration of the human psyche has led to a state when the entanglement of various roles fulfilled by people illustrated in the phenomenon of the postmodern human condition is the only viable explanation for the fragmentation and disillusionment felt by the postmodern man.

The phenomenon of writer's block, as presented by King in his literary corpus, is not only the result of the occurrence of self-splitting but it also appears to be the reflection of yet another strong motif present in contemporary Lacanian psychoanalysis, namely the Oedipus complex. It is no accident that King's literary characters are exclusively male. Taking to account Lacan's theory that the child (in this case the male child) turns from the mother in order to appease the father because he is not lacking the phallus, it becomes clear that the writer's block is a representation of the metaphorical verbal castration which, through the agency of language itself, is forced upon the male characters. Danny Torrence's strict alcoholic father who teaches him to read and the father of Thad Beaumont's successful novels, George Stark, both appear to be castrating father figures. In Danny's case, even though he is unable to read, his ability to 'shine' is put in the light of psychoanalysis by sexualizing the content of the symbolic order realized by thoughts heard by Danny. As he explains why he doesn't try to 'shine' his parents, it "*would be like peeking into the bedroom and watching while they're doing the thing that makes babies*" (King, 2001, p. 83). The moment Danny

tries to read the signifiers in his mother's thoughts, "*she suddenly felt more naked than naked, as if she were caught in an obscene act, a masturbatory act*" (p. 201). The sexualization of the symbolic order and Danny's reluctance to read his parents' thoughts point to verbal castration. The same could be said about Thad's problem with his Other, George Stark. Stark is the real reason for Thad's success and Thad is only a conduit, an empty vessel which Stark fills up with his imaginative invention, Alexis Machine. As the father of Thad's novels, his transference into the extralinguistic reality by acquiring a corporeal form, symbolically and verbally castrates Thad. It is so, because he loses the ability to produce passionate fiction and the only thing he is left with is just a worthless husk of an imagination, which is barely capable of producing writing void of sentiment and any literary merit whatsoever.

Though King depicts this phenomenon of castration metaphorically, he also does so literally. In both *The Shining* and *The Dark Half*, there are literal references to the physical act of castration. In the case of *The Shining* when Danny encounters a specter, much like his father Jack (who is also in Danny's dream depicted as a man-eater) is becoming under the influence of the corruptive powers of the Overlook hotel, Danny 'shines' it: "*I'm going to eat you up little boy. And I'm going to start with your plump little cock*" (King, 2001, p. 334). In a similar manner, in the case of *The Dark Half*, George Stark's first murder of Frederick Clawson, the man responsible for Thad's pseudonym being laid to rest, is a

vile one. Stark literally castrates him and stuffs his manhood into his mouth. This literal act of castration is done in a similar manner in which Clawson symbolically castrates Thad Beaumont by outing Stark as his pseudonym. The realization that King used the juxtaposition of the metaphorical and literal forms of castration in both respective novels, continually points to the involvement of Lacanian psychoanalysis in King's writing.

3.3 Castrating Father Figures

Furthermore, the parallel between Lacan and King deepens when another motif of Lacanian psychoanalysis is brought to light. In his study called *Écrits*, Lacan suggests: "*the divine voices will make their concert heard in the subject* [the self which is being castrated] *in order to tell the Name-of-the-Father to fuck himself* […] *in the backside and to find the Son* [the self] *in his certainty*" (Lacan, 1977, p. 220-221). First of all, in King's epic Postmodern serial, *The Dark Tower*, King clearly adopts and slightly transforms the motif of Lacan's Face-of-the-Father. Every time when the main protagonist, Roland Deschain, wants his companions to focus on something the uses a phrase 'remember the face of your father' and when they fail at something, he uses the phrase 'you have forgotten the face of your father,' which brings about shame and feelings of guilt in his companions psyches. Although it could be argued that this is an unsubstantial claim, combined with the fact that one of the main

characters, same as King himself, never met his father on the account that he ran away:

"*Eddie Dean, you have forgotten the face of your father! Damn it, Roland! I haven't forgotten the face of anyone, I never knew my father*" (King, 1991, p. 175)!

The fact that one of Roland's companions, Eddie Dean, has never met his father and he still feels shame and guilt over it strongly points to the Lacanian motif of an empowered father figure as well as King's use of the slightly altered Name-of-the-Father phenomenon in his literary corpus.

While shame and guilt are the tools which the Father possesses, the Son is not left powerless. Lacan's strongly worded declaration calling the subject to defy the Father, strongly agrees with King's concept of disempowering the other by stripping the medium of language from him. Gorge Stark is the perfect example of this kind of argumentation. Stark has been established as a father figure, though not to Thad directly, but at the very least to his writing. Thad than hears out Lacan's cry for the freedom of the Son from the castrating Name-of-the-Father and disempowers him by denying him access to the symbolic realm of existence while at same time brings him from the pre-symbolic stage to the symbolic realm of consciousness one last time in order to destroy him. As it was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the horrors in King's metafictional writing are presented as linguistic problems and the action of Thad denying Stark access to the written discourse is an

action both redemptive as well as frustrating. It is because Stark is a creation which is made entirely out of words, that we may perceive him as a solely linguistic problem. By bringing a linguistic content, such as Stark undoubtedly is, from the pre-symbolic womb of the unconscious mind to the symbolic realm of language, Thad ultimately gets rid of his murdering Other, thus reaffirming his fragmented self, but at the same time he loses his ability to write, which means he is still in a state of metaphorical castration induced by the Other, which results in a life-long frustration.

What Lacan and King are trying to point out is that the agency of written discourse, i.e. the self of a writer, more than anyone else's, is susceptible to the phenomenon which contemporary theories call the postmodern human condition. It is characterized by self-splitting and further fragmenting the human psyche. And as King very skillfully portrays, the horrific entities presented in King's postmodernist fiction are in fact merely projected reflections interiorized in the shattered human psyche.

4 Stephen King on Criticism: *Duma Key* and Intertextuality

This chapter examines yet another example of King's inspiration by the intricacies of postmodernist thought, namely Julia Kristeva's notion of intertextuality in writing. King's reflection of this postmodernist theory is rather unique, as he contemplates not just the origins of his artistic talent, but he also comments on the very idea of intertextuality in the written discourse. He does so by skillfully mirroring the whole notion of intertextuality with the story expressed in his novel, *Duma Key*.

As it has been mentioned, Kristeva presents her theory by widely drawing on Lacanian post-structuralist psychoanalysis, mainly Lacan's presentation of the three distinct realms of human thought, i.e. the imaginary, the real, and the symbolic. As her point of reference, Kristeva has chosen the realm of the imaginary as the starting point for her theory. What we know as the human unconscious, she understands as the domain where the abstract connections germane to language are made. It is in the claim that the Id is structured like language where the notion of intertextual relations is realized.

However, there is a definite split from Kristeva's view of this phenomenon in King's writing. While Kristeva sees the notion of intertextuality as a chiefly linguistic problem, King adopts a different approach and expands this notion into a form which encompasses not only literature but all forms of artistic endeavor. Although it certainly

can be stated that King's postmodernist fiction has a very strong connection with the medium of written discourse, in the case of *Duma Key*, it is talent as such that is the priority. In this novel, King takes liberties not only with metatextual relations, but he also contemplates the validity of literary criticism, as well as where the artistic talent of a writer, and artists in general, comes from. This novel is completely unique to King's literary corpus. While he usually gives the abstract concepts present in his fiction corporeal form, in the case of *Duma Key* he does the opposite. He tries to reach the highest form of abstraction imaginable after which he uses the literary medium of horror fiction to remake these concepts into material form, giving them a pleasant allegorical feel. In other words, King's genius stems from him being able to bring abstract notions, which intertextuality undoubtedly is, and put them into the fictional world by bringing them from an ethereal plane of existence onto a concrete level.

4.1 Where Does It All Come From?

Duma Key tells the story of the owner of a successful construction company called Edgar Freemantle. One day, when on a construction site, Edgar suffers a nearly lethal accident as a result of which he is left physically as well as mentally impaired. During the long period of his recovery, he is left alone because he and his wife get divorced. Edgar then moves to one of the Florida Keys where he takes residence in a beautiful house on the beach. Edgar suddenly starts to feel urges to express his unconscious desires and starts to paint a

massive amount of surreal and artistically valuable pictures. Edgar's stay on the Key coincides with several macabre events (seeing apparitions, visions, trances, etc.). Later in the story it becomes apparent that his visions, trances, and compulsions are tied to a horrific entity which dominates Edgar's subconscious. Parallel with the story of Edgar, King tells another story which is expressed in short breaks in the narration. These segments named 'How to Draw a Picture' are an account of Elizabeth's (a little girl) accident where a portion of her brain, same as in Edgar's case, becomes damaged and as a result, she also feels urges to paint. Through painting, she slowly learns to verbally express conscious thoughts all over again. She literally tries to make sense of the world in a manner in which she learns to determine the signifiers of a language via the medium of painting.

Duma Key starts with the first segment of the 'How to Draw a Picture' series of narration breaks. In it, King gives instructions on how to start painting by stating that an artist should "*start with a blank surface. It doesn't have to be paper or canvas, but I feel it should be white*" (King, 2008, p.1). When taking into account not only the similarities between the two main characters, Elizabeth and Edgar, but King himself, this novel can be thought of as a metaphorical reflection of intertextuality which is thus reasserted, same as in King's reflection of Lacanian psychoanalysis, through the King's mastery of the practice of metafiction.

First of all, it must be stated that in 1999, Stephen King experienced a nearly fatal accident after which he suffered from writer's block and was unable to produce any writing whatsoever. Gradually, he managed to get through his trauma and start to write again. The parallels between Elizabeth, Edgar, and King become apparent. King, similarly to Edgar (and Elizabeth as well) endured a period of recovery during which his artistic talent was stagnant. After his recovery, King inexplicably started to produce a massive amount of fiction. Since 1999 he has written well over forty novels, collections of short stories, and novelettes, which is approximately the same amount as he had written between '74 and '99. His accident basically served as a catalyst for his artistic talent. Same as in King's case, his protagonist produces vast amounts of paintings. This accident has lead not only to the creation of several of King's best pieces of writing but he has also returned to the question to which he wasn't given a satisfactory answer, which is the origin of an artistic talent in general.

Duma Key is essentially one giant entangled web of notions in which King tries to determine the origins, not only of his own talent, but rather talent as such. When describing little Elizabeth's struggle with painting, King asks: "*Who was the artist, who the blank surface*" (King, 2008, p. 324)? The confusion in answering this dilemma is quite apparent. He ponders whether the ability of an artist to produce artistically valuable work comes from the innerself or from a completely different place. This is exactly what Kristeva asks

in her *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (1980). Her answer to this question dwells in the complicated interior of the abstract concept of the collective 'textual unconsciousness' in which every single piece of writing is embodied and perceived by other users of this written discourse. As Kristeva states, "*every text is from the outset under the jurisdiction of other discourses which impose a universe on it*" (p. 42). Although King only infers this in his metatextual novel, he does explicitly assume his position in concordance with Julia Kristeva in different narrative previously discussed in the course of this work.

In *Umney's Last Case*, when Landry talks to Clyde about the act of writing, he explains to Clyde where he came up with the names of Clyde and other characters living in his fictional world. Landry admits that "*Vernon Klein…Peoria Smith…and Clyde Umney, of course. That was the name of the lawyer in* [Raymond Chandler's] Playback" (King, 2007, p. 859). The musings of Landry continue when Clyde accuses his own literary creator of plagiarism. Landry then quickly responds by admitting to this, at least to a certain extent, but he makes a very interesting point which is quite relevant to understanding King's writing in context of intertextuality by saying:

> All right; perhaps I *did* do a little pilfering. Certainly I adopted Chandler's style for my own, but I'm hardly the first; Ross Macdonald did the same thing in the fifties and sixties, Robert Parker did it in the seventies and eighties, and the critics decked them with laurel leaves

> for it. Besides, Chandler learned from Hammett and Hemingway, not to mention pulp-writers like--- (King, 2007, p. 859)

King seems to be well aware of the fact that the phenomenon of borrowing ideas, structures, styles, and characters from other authors is core in understanding how literature works. And he further expands his notions on this literary fact by demonstrating his own view in "Secret Window, Secret Garden". As it was examined before, the protagonist, Morton Rainey, is accused of plagiarism and he, in a similar manner to Landry, admits it up to a point by stating that "*writing stories has always felt a little bit like stealing*" (King, 1990, p. 11), and continues to examine this issue further because Rainey's consciousness is reluctant to admit to himself that he has in fact physically stolen the story. Rainey rationalizes this theft by claiming that he "*might have stolen this story, like all his others, from The Great Idea Bank of the Universe*" (p. 18). By capitalizing this abstract concept of the idea bank, King effectively deifies the concept into an amorphous entity out of which writers continually and unconsciously draw notions which are transformed into literary fiction. Furthermore, and more importantly, King seems to be in sync with the phenomenon which is referred to in this book as the 'collective textual unconsciousness', i.e. the manifestation of all written text in the history of humankind. King thus acknowledges that any written discourse is consciously or unconsciously dominated by preconceived literary texts.

4.2 How to Draw a 'Picture' in the Postmodern World

Coming back to *Duma Key*, in another one of the 'How to Draw a Picture' segments, King advises on how to construct an artistic artifact. He explains that when one wants to create art, in the case of this novel, a picture, one must "*start with what* [one] *know*[s], *than re-invent it*" (King, 2008, p. 170). It should be noted that King does not have any illusions when it comes to art in contemporary society. As it can be observed, Stephen King does not suggest inventing something new, but rather re-inventing what has already been conceived. This points to the classic dilemma which has surfaced in recent decades in every corner of culture as such, but most notably in literature. King questions the ability of writers to come up with something original and again, in harmony with Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality, realizes that in culture, and today's culture in particular, it is virtually impossible to conceive purely original notions with no or even little preconceptions present in the cultural artifact in question. What King and Kristeva are getting at is whether being re-inventive in a society, which is dominated by a vast plurality of thought, is contradictory to being original. This rather complicated question brings up a very interesting point because when it is considered that the notion of intertextuality is a viable literary phenomenon, it could be concluded that an integral part of literary criticism is rendered inert. It is so because intertextuality might help to bridge the distinction between high and low culture

and collapse these two realms into one another, thus destabilizing the very notion of literary criticism.

King usually tries to stray away from comments on literary criticism since he writes simply because it is his biggest passion in life. In essence, he writes literature for literature's, as well as his own, sake. *Duma Key*, being a partly metatextual novel, is an exception. In it, King comments on literary critics through his main character, Edgar. He is confronted with an art critic by the name of Mary Ire, who conducts an interview with him. She is presented as an enthusiastic and passionate critic and King tries to get under the skin of each and every literary critic via portraying Mary Ire, whose "*questions were* [really] *about her.*" Edgar

> could see the longing look in her eyes as she asked them. They were the eyes of a kid who knows the closest she's ever going to get to realizing her dream of the high trapeze is sitting on a bleachers at the Saturday matinee performance. She was a critic, and lots of critics who aren't called to do what they write about grow jealous and mean and small in their disappointments (King, 2008, p. 504).

Furthermore, when King is put in parallel with Edgar one more time, it may be stated that *Duma Key* is King's reflection of his status in the literary tradition. While Edgar possesses the talent to draw pictures, his stay on the island of Duma is in a way beneficial to him. His artistic talent is greatly amplified, though he does not realize this, by a horrific entity, which represents the antagonist of this novel. In the same manner as Edgar's talent is intensified, so is King's ability

to produce literary fiction in its bare form, such as it is demystified here, magnified by his use of horror fiction as a lens through which every sociological, psychological, as well as philosophical concept which he employs in his writing, is being realized. There are both positive and negative aspects of his approach to literature.

On one hand, King is viewed by many as a titan of horror fiction, and by employing his ideas into this style of writing, he is able to completely reinvent the whole genre as well as the face of literary fiction itself. On the other hand, though, he is dismissed by literary critics who refuse to acknowledge him as a tangible part of the literary tradition, and as a result, King is cast aside as just another popular author without any literary merit whatsoever, as presented by critics such as Harold Bloom or Dwight Allen.

Duma Key is one of King's recent books filled with a myriad of different ideas and concepts, but what really stands out in this novel is King's reflection of the artistic talent in the context of intertextuality. This appears to be one of the highest possible forms of metafiction. While in the aforementioned metafictional literary pieces King continually and predominantly reflects on the relation between writers and their literary creations, and shakes the foundation of the Platonic concept, realized by the distinction of reality and fiction; in *Duma Key*, he attains metafictional heights by going beyond the conventional techniques of this undeniable part of contemporary literary fiction. He does so by allegorically

questioning the source from which art is produced, as well as his own status in the literary tradition. The zeal for truth and success of every creator of fiction stems from their need to "*re-establish the world by picturing it*" (King, 2008, p. 1). Therefore, using the language of Jacques Lacan as well as Julia Kristeva, the written discourse is first and foremost a medium through which authors try to capture the real via the symbolic realm of human experience, which is exactly what Stephen King does in his fiction.

5. Worlds, Worlds, and Nothing but Worlds

So far, elements of King's postmodernist fiction have been analyzed separately and accounted for in a number of novels, novelettes, and short stories. The final chapter of this book deals with the culmination of King's postmodernist literary attempts, not in several stories, but in one ultimate literary piece, which encompasses all of King's postmodernist attempts. Stephen King's *The Dark Tower* series is comprised of all the characteristics of postmodern fiction analyzed above. He combines elements of metafiction, intertextuality, and the contemporary multiple-worlds theory[3].

As it has been mentioned, metafiction is a very flexible and creative literary practice, which permeates all of the postmodernist theories employed by King in his writing. Therefore, it could be stated that his magnum opus, the *Dark Tower* series, does not merely incorporate the phenomenon of self-conscious fiction, but it rather centers around it. Metafiction serves as the central pillar around which each and every postmodernist element present in the series revolves.

By embedding all of these postmodernist tendencies deep within the layers of his epic story, King manages to merge together the classic Victorian "*Arthurian legend*" (Waller, 2008, p.2) with elements of epic high fantasy of J.R.R. Tolkien, such as "*the*

[3] The multiple-worlds theory, widely known as the multiverse theory, is a concept known to theoretical physics. For further discussion on the subject, see Greene (2011), among others.

righteous quest to save mankind from certain destruction" (2008, p.2), as well as some aspects of the Victorian poetry of Robert Browning and Modernist impulses introduced to poetry by T.S. Eliot. All of these and many more literary and cultural references are connected and combined into a constructive composite which is under the dominion of postmodernist thought.

The Dark Tower series is first and foremost overshadowed by chaos and confusion. It is essentially a never-ending sea of information which is comprised of intrinsic intertextual relations inherent solely to King's literary body of work, several extrinsic intertextual connections as well as various pop-cultural references. They coexist side by side with an extensive classic heroic quest tale, which, however, incorporates very non-traditional characters and settings as well. This postmodern series centers on Roland Deschain, a gunslinger, who wanders the world in search of the elusive Dark Tower, which King characterizes rather vaguely as a "*kind of a power-nexus. In time*" (King, 2003a, p.93). The Dark Tower is the core of Roland's world and, as he comes to realize, not only his own world. During Roland's travels he encounters and ventures into several other worlds, which represent parallel universes. He does so either by encountering doors leading directly into them or, so called 'thinnies' which are transparent and permeable membranes between realities and also gateways to other worlds. During his travels he encounters three very strange and surreal characters not akin to any form of an epic fantasy novel. Roland is drawn to three doors

through which he pulls three different people into his world, namely Eddie Dean, a recovering drug addict, a little boy named Jake Chambers and a legless, schizophrenic African-American woman, Odetta Holmes (at times Detta Walker) whose personality during the course of the story merges together, forming a new persona of Susannah Dean. All of these three characters are pulled by Roland from this world, our objective reality, although each of them from their respective time-lines. Eddie is transposed to Roland's world from the 1990's New York City, and Susannah comes from the 1960's. Jake is a unique case because he is pulled from his own world twice, both times in 1977, but the first time is when he dies of the wounds inflicted by a car accident and the second time, he is saved by Roland right before this car accident. The first time Jake encounters Roland, in the first book of this septimology, entitled *The Gunslinger*, he dies in Roland's world. He subsequently reappears in King's third book *The Wastelands*.

5.1 Confusing Fictional Realities

The basis for this chapter is the approach to the themes which King chooses to embark upon while writing his literary epic. King adds to the confusion expressed by the quantity of textual information present in the tale by introducing a strange style of storytelling, a vision "*he neither understands nor precisely knows where or how to pursue*" (Magistrale, 1992, p.142). The confusion thus felt by the reader is uncanny, as it is never clear in which universe the characters find themselves, not to mention the alienation represented

by the shroud of mystery surrounding the elusive quest for the Dark Tower, which is not cleared up until the very end, if that. The various perplexing and disconnected images within the story itself exemplify and mimic the collision of universes into one another. King is remarkably synchronized with the contemporary multiple-worlds theory that is established on the idea that "*there may be an infinite number of parallel universes containing space, time, and other forms of exotic matter*" (Gresh and Weinberg, 2007, p.192). King offers a model known to theoretical physics as a multiverse which is a theoretical concept where a "*universe is a part of a gigantic [structure, called a] multiverse*" (2007, p.193). The multiverse is exactly what King tells us the worlds involved in the landscape of *The Dark Tower* series are. When we examine the case of Jake being pulled from his timeline twice, we can conclude that each time, he was pulled from two separate universes. Therefore, the Jake who appears in the third volume of the series is Jake but in his core, he represents a different version of the person who had already been killed twice (once in his world by a car and once in Roland's world, also called Mid-world). The two versions of New York thus represent separate worlds which contribute to the Kingian multiverse of *The Dark Tower* series.

Furthermore, Roland's, and the rest of his companions' journey takes them to different histories and thus parallel universes which are only slightly different than their counterparts. For example, in the fourth volume entitled *Wizard and Glass*, the group derails a train

which they have taken in a desolate city in Mid-world and arrive through a 'thinnie' into present day Topeka, Kansas but in an alternate reality. The confusion is apparent when Eddie tries to make sense of the place where they are: "*Are we back home? If we are, where are all the people? And if something like Blaine [the train] has been stopping off in Topeka—our Topeka, Topeka, Kansas…*" (King, 2003b, p.186). The very fact that there are no people present at a railway station serves as an indicator that they have arrived in a parallel universe. These are just two cases of many in a myriad of confusing images which the author employs in his postmodernist narrative. The collision of worlds in King's *The Dark Tower* series – the interconnecting realities, universes as well as histories which form a titanic multiverse – is mirrored in King's brilliant interpretation of universal history, metafiction, and cultural fragmentation.

5.2 A Never-ending Cycle

The different historical periods of Eddy, Susannah, and Jake combined with the non-traditional and non-cathartic ending of *The Dark Tower* series coincides with King's belief in the concept of universal history. King renders the whole concept of history inert. In the seventh and last book of the series, called *The Dark Tower*, Roland is finally at the end of his quest and steps through the door he has always been searching for. The gunslinger

> paused for a moment, swaying on his feet. He thought he almost passed out. It was the heat of course; the damned heat. For a moment

> he had felt he was somewhere else. In the Tower itself, mayhap. But of course the desert was tricky, and full of mirages. The Dark Tower still lay thousands of wheels ahead (King, 2004b, p.828).

History seems to be non-existent in this epic. King again toys with his characters as well as his reader by rendering the central and most important symbol of the whole series a useless husk. The Tower becomes a symbol for nothing. It defies explanation, continuity, time as well as space. The Tower is all powerful, yet arbitrary. After more than four thousand pages, King's character is precisely where the epic began with the memories of his adventures fading away. This existential issue dominated by fragmentation, alienation, and isolation of the main character is what lies at the core of postmodernist thought. As Butler notes in his *Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction*, human beings in the postmodern era "*live, not inside reality, but inside* [their] *representations of it*" (2002, p.21). Reality as a whole thus becomes inert and fragmented, much like Roland's quest which is full of twists and turns, and in the end, amounts to nothing. King utilizes this knowledge and strengthens it by mirroring Roland's personal repetitive hell, in the form of his journey repeating over and over again, with the disillusionment felt by the postmodern man.

By the collision of worlds and his interpretation of the concept of history, King skillfully parallels the phrase which reflects the cultural zeitgeist of postmodern times: everything has already been done. Furthermore, he adamantly reaffirms this claim during the

course of the whole literary epic by juxtaposing the collision of worlds inside the multiverse with the cultural confusion and fragmentation present in today's world. King's employment of several historical periods characteristic of our world is an attempt to "*establish an explicit narrative link between the reader's and the writer's present and the older historical reality*" (Jameson, 1992, p.21). This link is realized through various intertextual references inherent to high-culture literature as well as pop-culture which, together, form a chaotic composite that mirrors the fragmentation of today's culture. King is thus able to give a diagnosis of the problem which contemporary culture faces nowadays.

5.3 Healing Art in Contemporary Culture

The Dark Tower series is riddled with intertextual references not only to literature but also pop-culture. King mashes together "*elements of high and low*" (Waller, 2008, p.19) culture not only of contemporary origin but also of different cultural periods, "*ranging from Shakespeare and T.S Eliot to the Rolling Stones and Z.Z. Top*" (2008, p.19). In the same way as King's fictional worlds collide, via overlapping with one another despite the fact that they are fundamentally different and separate realities, so do the cultural references present in the narrative. Therefore, the confusion in the multiverse of worlds becomes the mirror image of present day culture, a cultural multiverse. King not only gives a diagnosis of the problem in contemporary society but also tries to remedy the

situation. In the same way as the worlds in his *The Dark Tower* series exist side by side with exact equality, so should culture be viewed as one. In the same manner as he thins the barriers between realities in his fiction, so does he tear down the contemporary distinction between high and low culture. King is in concordance with Ursula Le Guin who thinks that:

> The trouble with the Litfic [academically acclaimed fiction] vs Genre idea is that what looks like a reasonable distinction of varieties of fiction always hides a value judgment: Lit superior, Genre inferior. […] But still the opposition of literature and genre is maintained; and as long as it is, false categorical value judgement will cling to it, with the false dichotomy of virtuous pleasure and guilty pleasure (Le Guin, 2012).

The only way out from the fragmentation of today's cultural world is in what King suggests through him intertwining cultural references, and that is by simply flattening the two existing plateaus of high and low culture into one giant cultural multiverse which functions on the basis of equality rather than animosity. The very fact that King manages to create a literary epic by bringing together the high and low in culture while using it to point out existential, societal, and cultural problems of contemporary society, suggests the possibility of minimizing the differences between high and low culture and, consequently, flattening its worlds.

5.4 Dividing Intertextuality

The multiverse comprised of various fictional realities and cultural references opens the door to one of the strongest elements of postmodernism present in King's epic, intertextuality. The collapse of distinctions is described by Christopher Butler in his *Very Short Introduction to Postmodernism*, where he asserts that "*all texts are now liberated to swim, with their linguistic or literary or generic companions, in a sea of intertextuality in which previously accepted distinctions between them hardly matter*" (2002, p.24). As can be seen in connection with the flattening of cultures, as proposed by King in *The Dark Tower* series, by including the notion of intertextuality in literature, not only does literary criticism become ineffective, but this literary fact also dispels the traditional notion of two separate worlds in the literary tradition. Therefore, the distinction between high and low literature is rendered mute.

The Dark Tower series envelops two distinct plains of intertextuality. The first is the traditional form of intertextuality, i.e. the written form of a text with explicit allusions to some other extrinsic texts previously written by other authors. The second plain is introduced by King's employment of various intertextual relations within his own literary corpus, which makes *The Dark Tower* series a veritable nexus of intrinsic intertextuality as well as his crowning achievement.

The extrinsic intertextuality expressed in *The Dark Tower* series has a deliberately explicit form. King does not stray from the works that influenced the creation of his postmodernist epic; on the

contrary, he pays homage to the authors thanks to whom he was able to write it. In the afterward to the first of seven books, *The Gunslinger*, King acknowledges that the idea comes primarily from Robert Browning's poem *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came*, parts of which frequently and purposefully appear in the course of King's epic. He calls Browning's poem "*gorgeous and rich and inexplicable*" (King, 1988, p.221), and continues by saying that he wishes to write "*a long romantic novel embodying the feel, if not the exact sense*" (1988, p.221) of the poem. As may be seen by the sense of constant confusion and the richness of textual information which King presents in his epic, he has kept his promise. But Browning is not by any means his only literary source.

The title of the third book is *The Waste Lands*, which in itself does not directly suggest T.S. Eliot's involvement but taking into account the names of the two parts into which this book is divided, namely "Fear in a Handful of Dust" and "A Heap of Broken Images," directly points to T.S. Eliot's famous poem *The Waste Land*. Furthermore, Eliot's portrayal of the world after the destructive World War I is directly mirrored in King's description of the area of Roland's Mid-land, also known as the Waste Lands. Later in the story, it becomes known that Mid-land, just as our world around the time when Modernism emerged, had been subject to a great war, which has destabilized the land and destroyed a vast majority of its dwellings. And finally, as Robin Furth notes, the character of "*Roland, the isolated individual, is a survivor, but he is*

no more than a fragment of a larger, lost mosaic. He has no meaning. Like the landscape he travels, his soul has become a wasteland" (Furth, 2006, p.7). As Furth aptly points out, Roland's soul is equally, if not even more barren, than the desert and the waste lands which he wanders. This is one of numerous examples of King being a skillful writer. He combines Eliot's disillusionment of the self with a Poesque tendency of paralleling the environment to the state of the character's mind and thus reinforcing the desperation, isolation, and ultimate futility of both Roland and Mid-world itself, though it is not only Mid-world which is in jeopardy in this story.

The complicated nature not only of the story, but the very essence of King's literary fiction is fully realized through his employment of elements of intrinsic intertextuality within *The Dark Tower* series. It becomes further entangled when a strong metafictional element which permeates the intrinsic intertextuality is realized. The postmodernist epic is fully exposed when taking into account that King combines the previously discussed themes of intertextuality and the scientific notion of the multiple-worlds theory and binds them together under the bulwark of metafiction.

When Roland and his companions venture to Topeka and realize that it is abandoned, King speaks to the readers of his novels by making an allusion to one of his earlier works, *The Stand*. When the quartet comes to the abandoned Topeka, Jake picks up a newspaper with the headline: "***'Captain Trips' Superflu Rages Unchecked, Govt. Leaders May Have Fled Country Topeka Hospitals Jammed***

with Sick, Dying Millions Pray for Cure" (King, 2003a, p.196). 'Captain Trips' is the name of a genetically engineered superflu virus which wipes out a vast majority of civilization in the literary world of *The Stand*. Furthermore, in *The Gunslinger* and other books within the series, a recurring character by the name of Walter (at times Randal Flagg) appears. Walter is one of the chief antagonists in this epic, but it becomes clear that he, much like the Dark Tower itself, is a transdimensional and transuniversal being. First of all, he is the reason for Jake's car accident and subsequent death in his original world; therefore he possesses the ability to pass into different realities. Second of all, the character of Walter makes an appearance in several of King's other novels, for example, in *The Stand* as the infamous Randal Flagg, in *The Dead Zone* as well as *The Eyes of the Dragon*, and finally as Andre Linoge in King's screenplay entitled *The Storm of the Century*. He serves as a reader's conduit to various fictional universes created by King before the conception of *The Dark Tower* series. There is one more character who may be found in a different novel and that is father Donald Callahan, who "*came to [Mid-world] from another reality, one in which the events described in Salem's Lot actually took place*" (Wiater and Golden, 2006, p.40). Combined with the multiple-worlds theory, these examples supporting the claim of intrinsic intertextuality illustrate King's practice of metafiction par excellence. King is in accordance with Patricia Waugh who first proposed the notion of metafiction. According to her, metafictional

practice can be defined as a style of writing which "*self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as a literary artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality*" (Waugh, 1984, p.2). King abides by the rules of metafictional practice to the letter when he draws attention to the status of *The Dark Tower* series as a literary artefact. He does so by the aforementioned inclusion of the intrinsic and extrinsic literary references which greatly undermine the whole story-line as well as the continuity of the narrative itself.

5.5 Literature 101: How Does It Work?

In the course of this chapter, the multiverse has been described in relation to the extralinguistic reality as well as intertextuality. *The Dark Tower* series is first and foremost a metafictional epic; the multiverse, which King's fiction undoubtedly is, becomes entangled in the confines of literature itself. There is a distinct "*interconnectedness between [King's] previous literature, his own work, and the world of the readers*" (Waller, 2008, p.32). By transferring and combining both previously described notions of intertextuality and the multiple-worlds theory into King's literary fiction, it can be said that *The Dark Tower* series represents an advanced form metafictional practice.

In *Song of Susannah*, the sixth book of *The Dark Tower* series, King performs yet another act of metafiction when he incorporates himself into his postmodernist epic. Eddie and Roland venture into

our world to come and meet Stephen King himself, because they realize that they are mere pawns in the hands of a god. Before they meet King, Roland feels as though they are "*approaching the center of everything – the Tower itself, mayhap. It's as if, after all these years, the quest itself has become the point for me, and the end is frightening*" (King, 2004a, p.266). King thus reasserts and acknowledges his presence as the creator of his own literary fiction and not just *The Dark Tower* series, but all of his works, because he creates a metafictional and intertextual literary multiverse. By performing this metafictional act of writing himself into a very important position within the constraints of his fiction, he places authority and meaning into his hands, thus making himself into a metaphorical gravitational source around which each and every literary universe he has ever conceived revolves. He basically becomes the medium for the intrinsic intertextuality which dominates this postmodernist epic.

The Dark Tower series thus becomes a very convoluted, remarkable, and fitting account of the intricacies under which literary fiction as a whole operates. Both King and the Tower are static elements around which the story slowly develops. Therefore, it can be claimed that Stephen King's postmodernist epic is a description of the complex relations which subside in the background of literary fiction itself. On the grounds of this claim, the symbolism of King incorporating himself into his fiction in his own time and reality on one side, and the Tower inhabiting Mid-world on the other, it can be

stated that King and the Tower are physically static, but internally very fluid counterparts. In this sense, the character of Stephen King represents the writer as the creator of fictional universes, his own world represents objective reality, Roland's Mid-world symbolizes the world in which narratives are realized (fictional reality) and finally, the Dark Tower stands for the medium of written discourse itself, the written language.

Stephen King → Objective Reality − Fictional Reality ← The Tower

Having said that, King's epic allows this interpretation, much like Roland's quest, to wander a bit farther. When we consider this interpretation, we can expand it not just within King's literary body of work, but rather within the whole world of literature. In *The Waste Lands*, Eddie has a dream in which he sees the unattainable and illusive Dark Tower surrounded by blood, but then he realized that it was not blood he was looking at, but roses. The field stretched on for miles, climbing a gentle slope of land, and standing at the horizon was the Dark Tower (King, 2003a, p.378).

In this epic, the rose takes on many levels of symbolism, encompassing the Tower as well as the character of King himself. If a rose may be perceived as a writer and assuming that the Tower represents the medium of written discourse, it can be categorically stated that the sea of roses present before the Tower in Eddie's vision is a symbol of each and every writer who has ever lived and

bestowed his/her gifts upon literature. And although all writers strive to achieve linguistic perfection, it is unattainable in the same way as it is impossible for the roses to envelop the Tower itself. The only way to the Tower, paved with roses, could be perceived as a physical representation of intertextuality in writing because in order to get closer to the Tower, it is absurd to assume that you will not scratch yourself on a few thorns.

Based on the analysis given above, *The Dark Tower* series appears to be the apex of Stephen King's postmodernist writing. It serves as an ultimate representation of every postmodern tendency, theory and also practice embedded within his fictional corpus. King incorporates many elements native to postmodernist fiction, and creates a postmodern narrative which is well worth studying. In his series, King explores various literary concepts by immersing his own past novels into the world of *The Dark Tower* series while applying the contemporary multiple-words theory into their very foundation. Through this act, he explores the intricacies of intertextuality as a driving force behind postmodernist literary discourse. Furthermore, King's approach to intertextuality results in the splitting of this concept into its intrinsic and extrinsic forms which, in his hands, has the capacity to bring forth another important issue inherent to his analysis which is the problem of the contemporary distinction between high and low literature as well as culture as such. King not only identifies this problem but also offers a solution in the form of

flattening the plateaus of high and low culture into a postmodern composite which is characterized by equality. Lastly, King's magnum opus, *The Dark Tower* series may be interpreted as a kind of a model of literature presented as a synthesis of four main elements pivotal to King's story itself, namely the author as the creator of a fictional universe, objective reality from which authors draw their ideas, fictional reality which is the practical realization of written discourse, and, finally, the written discourse itself, a medium which ties together all of the three aforementioned pillars of literature as such.

Therefore, ranging from the multiple-worlds theory, through intrinsic and extrinsic intertextuality culminating in King's understanding of literature realized through his practice of metafiction, *The Dark Tower* series becomes an utterly singular and new form of literature which Waller aptly terms 'the Postmodern epic'.

Conclusion

Stephen King has always been an enigmatic figure in literature. He has been either cast aside to the fringes of serious literature or simply remained unnoticed by literary scholars. Critics like Harold Bloom or Dwight Allen, who adamantly refuse to acknowledge his work and constantly shroud it in prejudiced criticism only because they are either reluctant or unable to look behind the veil of his style of writng, are preventing his work from being taken seriously. In several cases, however, King has been slowly recognized not just as one of the best writers of horror fiction but also as the one who deserves to be a part of high-culture literature.

The present analysis of King's employment of postmodernist conceits in combination with the unique properties of horror fiction shows great innovations contributing to the world of postmodernist literature. King takes a rather unconventional approach to the concept of metafiction, as presented by Patricia Waugh. He completely ignores the traditional forms of metafiction (the self-begetting novel, surfiction and fabulation) and instead, three singular forms of self-conscious fiction are introduced, namely psychogenic, transpositional, and corporeal types of metafiction. Psychogenic metafiction can be identified in King´s novelette called "Secret Window, Secret Garden", where King questions the very fabric of reality by blurring the distinction between the literary universe and objective reality and mirroring it with the split psyche of his protagonist. By pointing out this contrast, King skillfully and

systematically flattens the distinction between said realities. This metafictional element coincides with the merging of the split persona of the protagonist into one composite, thus the metafictional component present in the story is generated in the character's psyche.

Transpositional metafiction deals with the examination of the nature of the relationship between authors and characters in their fictional universes, which is particularly visible in King´s short story called *Umney's Last Case*. Similarly to the previous one, this metafictional form is based on merging of the fictional world and extralinguistic reality, but also their subsequent split. This phenomenon is realized through the transposition of characters and the power writers hold over their fiction, while their respective universes remain the same. Due to a number of striking thematic similarities, this story is juxtaposed and compared with the fiction of an academically acclaimed author, Paul Auster.

Last but not least, the third metafictional practice developed by Stephen King is present in his novel called *The Dark Half*. This is the most notable multi-layered metafictional piece in King's literary corpus. It examines the intricacies of using a literary pseudonym, which serves here as the basis for comparing this novel to Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy*. While the plots and characters of Auster's novels are grounded in the real world, King uses a different approach and assimilates horror fiction with the traditional form of metafiction, known as the self-begetting novel. This is illustrated by the literary pseudonym of the novel's protagonist acquiring a

corporeal form which leads to the creation of an entirely new form of metafiction. The aforementioned multi-layeredness of *The Dark Half* is presented by King's acknowledgement of the fact that his metafictional monstrosity is modeled on his own experiences with a literary pseudonym. King thus fictionalizes his own metafictional novel which further deepens the metafictional element within.

The employment of the basic elements of post-structuralist psychoanalysis gives King's status in postmodernist literature great merit. King incorporates several of the most prominent and most recent developments in psychoanalysis, as presented by Jacques Lacan, into his fictional corpus with uncanny proficiency. In several novels, King mirrors Lacanian motifs of the development of the human psyche, the unconscious being structured like language, and the renewed theory of the Oedipus complex very accurately and purposefully. He once more entangles them within the confines of horror fiction which serves as an amplifier for his ideas. By incorporating Lacan's psychoanalysis into his fictional corpus and combining them with elements of metafiction, King is able to practically explore the disillusionment and fragmentation of the postmodern man which constitutes the central premise embodied in the phenomenon of the postmodern human condition.

In connection with Lacanian psychoanalysis, King examines another aspect of postmodern thought, namely the notion of intertextuality. This literary phenomenon is realized through its metaphorical reflection represented by Stephen King's *Duma Key*.

This novel encompasses King's attempts at examining not only the metatextual relations but also the very essence of the driving force behind art, which is the artistic talent. King thus puts the writer in the position of a mere conduit for preconceived textual information, therefore rendering the notion of originality inert. King also uses intertextuality to bridge the gap between high and low forms of literary fiction which undermines the very concept of literary criticism itself.

All of these contemporary tendencies, theories and practices are reflected at their best in King's ultimate postmodernist epic called *The Dark Tower* series. In this septimology, King examines the very foundation of literary fiction as well as criticism by combining metafiction, intertextuality, and contemporary scientific multiple-worlds theory into a postmodernist chaos of information. King basically presents a universal model which is composed of purely symbolic composites that encompass the four basic pillars of creating a written text, i.e. the author, extralinguistic reality, fictional universe, and language as a medium of written discourse. Furthermore, by dividing intertextuality into its intrinsic and extrinsic forms, in combination with the multiple-worlds theory, King renders literary criticism itself mute. He does so via the element of collapsing fictional universes, i.e. an act he positions in parallel with the flattening of the worlds of high and low culture, thus creating a vision of culture which functions on the principles of equality.

The findings in this work suggest that the shift in Stephen King's status in the literary tradition from popular fiction into the realm of academic value is justifiable. King’s unique ability to use horror fiction as a literary lens through which he perceives objective reality, serves as a mere veil under which a myriad of different insightful ideas reside. Despite the fact that immersing King’s literary universe into postmodernism has shown great promise in demystifying his place within the literary tradition, it is only a small fraction of what his unfathomable literary universe has to bestow upon literature itself. King’s unyielding endeavor embodied in his continuing desire to create serious literary artifacts, concealed under the patronage of horror fiction, combined with the literary recognition his work is receiving, shows the futility of all efforts to discredit King on the part of literary critics.

Resumé

Táto monografia sa sústreďuje na postmodernistické tendencie, ktoré sa nachádzajú v dielach Stephene Kinga. King je jedným z najprominentnejších autorou súčasnej hororovej fikcie. Rovnako sa táto práca zaoberá jeho miestom v literárnej tradícii, ktoré je determinované literárnymi kritikmi. Pretože je King vnímaný ako autor hororovej fikcie, jeho postavenie v literatúre je degradované a jeho diela sú sústavne označované za populárnu literatúru, a teda odsúvané na okraj literatúry. No samotný fakt, že King do svojich diel včleňuje prvky popredných postmodernistických literárnych a vedeckých teórií, ho činí kandidátom na vážne literárne skúmanie.

Cieľom tejto práce je prebádať dielo Stephena Kinga v kontexte postmoderných tendencií, ktoré sú charakteristické pre súčasnú literatúru, za účelom demystifikovania jeho miesta v literárnej trdícii. Hypotézou je, že literárny korpus Stephena Kinga zahŕňa niekoľko z najprominentnejších postmodrnistických teórií, ktoré do veľkej miery prispievajú k zvýšeniu jeho statusu vo svetovej literatúre, nie len ako velikána hororovej fikcie, no aj ako cenenú literárnu postavu, ktorá si zasluhuje svoje právoplatné miesto v literárnej tradícii.

Podrobná analýza použitia postmodernistických koncepcií v kombinácii s jedinečnými vlastnosťami hororovej fikcie, ukázala veľký potenciál pre inovácie, ktoré aktívne prispievajú svetu postmodernistickej literatúry. King volí trochu nekonvenčný prístup ku všetkým analyzovaným postmodernistickým teóriám, menovite k metafikcii, Lacanovkej post-štrukturalistickej psychoanalýze, ako

aj myšlienke intertextuality.

Vo svojich postmodernistických dielach King úplne ignoruje tradičné metafiktívne formy a vytvára ich permutácie. V práci boli izolované tri unikátne formy metafikcie: psychogenická, transpozičná a korporálna (hmotná) metafikcia.

Rovnako, pod záštitou hororovej fikcie, pracuje King aj s lacanovskou post-štrukturalistickou psychoanalýzou. King do analyzovaných románov implementuje základne prvky tejto psychoanalýzy s nevídanou zručnosťou. V týchto románoch King refleruje motívy vývinu ľudskej psychiky, nevedomia štrukturovaného na základe jazyka, ako aj revidovanú freudovskú teóriu Oedipovho komplexu. Tým, že King zavádza tieto motívy do svojich diel, veľmi zaujímavo prezentuje svoje skúmanie odcudzenia a fragmentácie zakúšanými postmoderným človekom, ktoré tvoria centrálnu premisu zvnútornenú vo fenoméne postmoderného stavu súčasného človeka.

V spojení s lacanovskou post-štrukturalistickou psychoanalýzou skúma King ďalší aspect postmoderného myslenia, a to myšlienku intertextuality. Tento literárno-lingvistický fenomén je predstavený cez eho metaforickú reflexiu, ktorá je prezentovaná v jeho románe zvanom *Duma Key*. Tento roman zahŕňa Kingove snahy o preskúmanie nie len metatextuálnych vzťahov, no aj samotnej podstaty hnacej sily, ktorá stojí na pozadí tvorby umenia, a teda umelecký talent. King týmto stavia spisovateľa ako tvorcu fickie do pozície média, ktorým už utvorené literárne texty len prechádzajú,

čím činí celú myšlienku originality v postmodernej spoločnosti inertnou. King rovnako používa koncepciu intertextuality k premosteniu svetov vysokej a nízkej formy literatúry, čo vlastne destabilizuje celý koncept literárnej kritiky.

Všetky vyššie uvedené súčasné tendencie a teórie sú vo svojom najlepšom reflektované v jednom z Kigovych najdôležitejších postmodernistických diel, serií kníh *The Dark Tower*. V tejto septimológii skúma King samotný základ literárnej fikcie, ako aj samotnej literárnej kritiky tým, že spája intertextualitu so súčasnou vedeckou teóriou mnohých svetov. King v podstate prezentuje univerzálny model, ktorý je zložený z čiste symbolických komponentov, ktoré sú reprezentované štyrmi základnými piliermi utvárania písomného text: autora, extralingivstickú reality, svet literárnej fikcie a napokon jazyk ako médium písomného diskurzu. Nadôvažok toho, spájaním vnútornej a vonkajšej intertextuality, v kombinácii s teóriou mnohých svetov, King destabilizuje koncept literárnej kritiky. Činí tak skrz element kolapsu jeho literárnych svetov, ktorý dáva do paralely so svetom vysokej a nízkej kultúry, ktorý je založení na princípe rovnosti.

Zistenia tejto práce naznačujú, že zmena v statuse Stephena Kinga z populárnej oblasti do oblasti akademickej je opodstatnená. Kingova unikátna schopnosť používať hororovú fikciu ako literárny objektív, skrz ktorý vníma objektívnu realitu, slúži len ako závoj, pod ktorým sa skrýva nespočetné množstvo hlbokých myšlienok. Naprik tomu, že sa ponorenie Kingovho literárneho sveta

do sveta postmodernizmu ukázalo v kontexte demystifikácie jeho neprebádanej tvorby ako veľmi produktívne, je to len malý zlomok toho, čo môže jeho neprebádaný románový svet literature poskytnúť. Kingova nepoddajná snaha o tvrobu hodnotných literárnych artefaktov pod záštitou hororovej fikcie, v kombinácii s literárnym uznaním, ktoré sa mu postupne dostáva, poukazuje na bezvýslednosť všetkých snáh niektorých literárnych kritikov ho zdiskreditovať.

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